Vol. LIII NOVEMBER, 1917 No. 3

The SMART SET

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AND

BURLESQUES, EPIGRAMS, POEMS, SHORT SATIRES, ETC.

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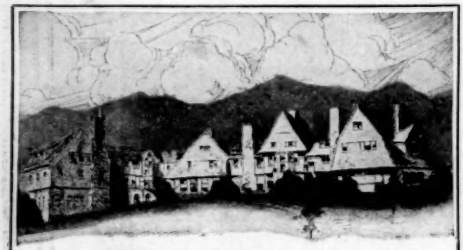

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Vol. LIII NOVEMBER, 1917 No 3.

The SMART SET

Imitated, but Unrivalled.

SEMIRAMIS

By William F. Jenkins

THE king lay grouchily on his couch and watched Babylon building. He had had a huge mound of earth thrown up, on top of which was his pavilion. There, where cooling breezes blew and his eye could reach to the farthest corner of the mighty city his brain had planned, he lay and watched his workmen.

He saw gangs of slaves carrying loads of bricks, draft-animals dragging huge timbers, boats floating on the canals loaded with materials for the great edifices to be constructed. He saw the flocks of sheep and herds of cattle being driven in to feed the army of his workmen. He saw the orderly bustle of this, the greatest enterprise of the civilization of his time.

Knowing that the enterprise was his, the plan his plan, and the carrying out of that plan but a proof of the extent of his power, he felt the vastness of that power as never before—yet was unsatisfied. A woman held him in thrall. Semiramis—a tiny, red-haired girl from one of the Syrian provinces—bent his will to hers until he felt a very slave.

He was as putty in her hands. He had built her a palace requiring the revenues of a kingdom to maintain—at her demand. She did not *ask*, she *demanded*.

He had sent an army sorely needed elsewhere to conquer a certain small kingdom because she, Semiramis, had been told that the queen of that country was more beautiful than she, and wished to know. He had ordered that queen slain at the nod of the Syrian's imperious red head.

Lying on his couch, watching the endless industry and the ever-rising dust from the multitude of laborers working on the city which was to be the Queen of all the World, the king groaned.

A courier rode madly up to the foot of the royal mound, dismounted and rushed up to the top. A message from the king's friend and ally, the King of Arabia.

Dismissing the message until a later time, the king curiously examined the little casket of gifts which had accompanied the roll of parchment. The casket was of ebony, beautifully inlaid

with gold. Opened, a little tray of precious gems was seen, and below a costly dish full of the Arabian sweetmeats of which the Babylonian king had so often heard.

The king poked them with his finger. Dates from the most carefully guarded and cultivated date trees of all Arabia were there, preserved in sugar. In those days sugar was worth far more than its weight in gold. And this was no ordinary sugar. It was colored with strange and beautiful colors, and scented with sweet scents.

The king's mouth watered.

Instinctively, he thought of sending them to Semiramis, and then in a flash of rebellion—she had been unusually exacting of late—he determined to eat them all himself.

He carefully selected a particularly striking piece of lavender sugar, skilfully moulded into a spirited likeness of a horseman charging, and put it into his mouth. He sucked it meditatively.

For an instant he smiled, and then he howled. There was a cavity in one of his rear teeth—and there was not a dentist in the whole valley of the Euphrates! It was a large cavity, and reached deep down to a tender nerve. The king howled frankly and openly. He kicked the courier who had brought the gifts. His entourage gazed at him in alarm. Such outbursts were not rare.

But presently the king, having kicked nearly every article of furniture out of his tent and down the slope of the mound, together with two or three of the nearest courtiers, in a measure subsided. He sank down on his couch—which was too heavy to kick—and held both hands to his jaw.

It was at precisely this instant that a messenger from Semiramis arrived. He was a slave, frightened beyond even the wont of slaves entering the royal presence. The king had a reputation for having people—and slaves in particular—flayed, hanged, crucified or boiled in oil if they offended him or sought to interfere with his plans, and this slave was very sure he was near the end of his span of life. His message was that his mistress, the imp from Syria, was displeased because when the wind came from the east dust from the work of the city blew out to the tents in which her suite reposed and not only annoyed her suite but Semiramis herself. Therefore, she desired that the king order all work to cease when the wind blew from such a quarter, in order that no dust be raised to annoy her.

Having given his message, the slave cowered to the ground and waited for his doom.

For one instant, amazed at the colossal impudence of the woman who had made such a request, the king stared. Then he leaped to his feet. The slave turned and ran, but the royal toe caught him and he soared through the air. The king roared again. In some way the quick motion had irritated his tooth and he was again frantic. He roared again. The slave was beyond his reach, but the king threw the ebony casket after him, missed and shouted in a frenzy of rage, ". . . . . —and tell her to go to Hell!"

Two hours later, his tooth quieted, the king was engaged in wondering how on earth he would square himself with the red-haired one. Ruefully, he supposed he'd have to give in. . . . It was criminal, especially as the wind blew from the east at least half the time, but it would have to be done. He knew Semiramis much too well to suppose she would permit him to have her pavilion shifted to another position.

But when he went to her tent that night he found her in tears. He stared at her in amazement and she clasped his feet and begged him to forgive her and tell her once more that he loved her.

THE INTOLERABLE HONOR

By Lilith Benda

IMMORTAL words have been written of that artist who painted a Venus rising from the sea at sunless dawn, and with sorrow on her face,—a Madonna for whom high cold *Magnificats* have no meaning, and who shrinks from the intolerable honor that has come to her. Immortal words have been written of this artist who conceived humanity as an incarnation of "those angels who, in the revolt of Lucifer, were neither for Jehovah nor for His enemies," whose interest was neither with untempered good nor untempered evil, whose faces were "saddened perpetually by the shadow upon them of the great things from which they shrink."

I

BAYARD GAYLOR, conscious of a sense of well-being, of that warm affection for noisy crowds, high buildings, familiar streets which a homecomer experiences after a long absence from his native city, hurried through Broad street on his way to Perriam's office.

Three years of restless globe-trotting were over, and it was good to be back in New York, it was good to foretaste the pleasure of seeing Perriam again,—Stacey Perriam, half mystic, half man-about town, the recipient of many a confidence, the companion on many a hunting trip and many an escapade. It was good, even, once more to be threading one's way among the men, for the most part of a coarse and showy type who swarmed Broad street, hurling jocularities of commercial parlance at one another, jostling such passersby of the ornamental sex as pleased the eye.

The throng, however, parted and made way for Gaylor as he swung along, his steel blue eyes lowered in apparent abstraction. For there was that about the man which commanded, even from a crew of happy-go-lucky roisterers, an instinctive deference. There was a certain poise, a courtliness, a charm of manner, betrayed by his very gait and bearing which tended peremptorily to set him apart from the crowds. Tall, slender, well-knit, well-groomed, his prematurely gray hair accentuated the boyishness and brown pallor of a face in whose detached smile and look of reverie lay something suggestive of a knight of Arthurian legendry.

There was no hint of the mask in Gaylor's composition. A sight of him alone would have enabled an experienced physiognomist immediately to place him as a romantic, a cosmopolite indolent, straightforward, impulsive, a trifler in spite of himself who shied at the world in its graver aspects, who had loved lightly and many times—the sort of man to whom women make whispered allusions to Tuscan starlight and the almond blossoms of Sorrento, and at the same time the sort of man who, by virtue of an inherent simplicity, remains all the more Parsifal for the Kundrys who woo, and rarely in vain.

The experienced physiognomist might easily have associated him with tiger hunts, tarpon fishing, and the diplomatic service. The experienced physiognomist would not have been surprised to hear of the little South American revolution engineered a few years before, not in espousal of a just cause, but for sheer joy of the fray.

And, above all, the experienced physiognomist would have cried "I told you so!" when, on this May morning Gaylor stopped short for an instant, his eyes brightening out of their abstraction, his face assuming an alert expression,—and all at his first glimpse of a woman walking a few yards ahead of him.

It was her diminutiveness which first arrested him, then the pretty hauteur of her uplifted head, and her swaying grace as she walked along with slow, almost faltering steps, and finally a glimpse of golden brown hair, its sheen enhanced by the sunlight, subdued by a close-fitting toque and flowing black veil. Her costume was black, too, of a lustrous elegance, which despite the fact that no touch of color relieved its sombreness, in no wise suggested mourning. And at length she turned her head a little sideways so that he saw what struck him as the most exquisite of profiles.

Here was beauty which conformed to no established standard, and yet beauty in its quintessence, beauty potent to arrest a man long since innured to feminine allure. A little nose tilted slightly over full lips which were parted as with a child's eager wonderment over the newness of things, and their crimsoness accentuated the warm, white transparency of her skin, and the golden lights in her hair.

Gaylor slackened his pace the more deliberately to view this little lady who appeared so out of place amidst the bustle and roar of vulgarity of the busy street—

"Cuckoo! Cuckoo! How'd you like to have your picture taken with a handsome broker,—out of work but happy? Cuckoo! You there with the long black veil!"

Gaylor's eyes narrowed with resentment. A youth evidently much the worse for that attack of mental befuddlement which besets a "morning after" was leering at the woman. With unsteady steps he kept pace with her, bending his heavily flushed face toward her. After a moment, without meeting his eyes, she uplifted her face, and the expression there restrained Gaylor's quick impulse to interfere.

Great eyes of a deep amber looked up gently, and with an expression of infantine wonderment. The full lips were parted in the ghost of a smile, and a delicate flush suffused her face. She seemed rapt, untroubled, in no way concerned with these proceedings. . . .

By some obscure process of ideation the sight of her evoked in Gaylor a fugitive memory of his boyhood. The Knights of the Round Table had been his gods then, and in his volume of Malory he recalled the picture of a little lady waving a scarf from a battlemented tower which somehow . . .

His reflections were interrupted. A group of young curb brokers had gathered about watching the incident. And he saw their faces change as they looked at the woman. The sly smiles faded.

"Cut it, Charlie, cut it," one of them interposed, and laid a restraining hand on the boy's arm.

He, however, shook it off. And still wavering from foot to foot, "Hey, there!" he called to one of the bystanders, "Draw me out a hundred bones in ones. Going to take my doll out tonight!"

For the first time the woman turned her glance full upon him. Through heavy lashes the amber eyes looked up mistily and very gently. The smile quivered into a quick radiance. "A tre-men-dously rip-roaring hangover" she murmured, drawing out the words as in a happy breathless astonishment. And while she spoke, while he looked at her, the flush on the boy's face deepened into a great crimson flood. He backed away agape, while over his face there stole a look of deference, of wonder.

"Sorry—I—I beg your pardon," he mumbled.

And then a curious thing happened.

For the first time the woman's serenity deserted her. The boy stared at her as if realizing himself guilty of a sacrilege. Her smile faded. Gaylor saw a

look of distinct alarm pass over her face, while the head held hitherto so proudly aloft, drooped. She nodded and walked on with her swaying, faltering steps.

Gaylor overtook her presently, and passed her by. He was firmly convinced that he would see her again. There were possibilities in the air. His mood of warm affection for all the noise and hurry of the crowded thoroughfare deepened into a glad tranquility. And after he had entered the building where Perriam's office was located, just as the lift shot upwards, he thought he caught sight of her coming in through the doorway.

II

"GLAD to see you."

The words were uttered with a brusque emotionlessness which delighted Gaylor, in that it bridged the gap of a three-years' separation and made it seem but yesterday that he had conversed with this friend whose habit it was to speak coldly, with averted eyes, and to end his discourse successively with a snap of the jaws, a gimlet look, a metallic laugh, and a subsequent relaxation of the mouth and softening of the eyes which betokened a side of him sternly repressed by automaton-like smiles and gestures, a side all the dearer to Gaylor because habitually hidden.

Perriam lit a cigarette, and rose with calm deliberation. The two friends stood looking at each other without a word, in that little hush which bespeaks the resumption of a valued association.

It was the moment of a long handclasp, and silence, and shifting eyes. And then followed the uncertain laugh to cover a genuine emotion, the trite remark to relieve the tension.

Standing beside one another, the two presented a vivid contrast, Gaylor by his length of limb and gallant bearing making the other seem more undersized than he actually was, sallower and puffier about chin and eyelids.

Stacey Perriam, a dapper individual with a curled mustache and spruce manner of dressing which proclaimed him one of the sporting type, was a denizen of Broadway, who, with the usual allotment of footlight Delilahs, numbered among his friends bucket shop sharks, race track touts, prize fighters, a grand duke, and a crown prince.

Gaylor had never been able quite to determine what it was that endeared this man to him. There had been times when the friendship embarrassed him, times when Perriam, discarding his habitual curtness, had fussed and fumed over him like a hen concerned over the welfare of her pet chick,—times, too, when Perriam's proclivities for pretentious parade had excited aversion.

And yet there was a recklessness, an audacity about the man which attracted immensely. For all a surface shrewdness, for all an ability to negotiate far-famed coups on the Stock Exchange, he had played too fairly, and plunged too heavily ever to amass a fortune. And always, beneath a cheap and prosaic veneer, there had revealed itself something of the high-hearted visionary about the man, an aliveness to the beautiful in its manifold aspects, incoherent, intangible, but unmistakably there. . . . And now, scrupulously concealing the pleasure each felt at the meeting, the two smiled, looked at one another, puffed at their cigarettes.

After a full two minutes of silence, "How about lunch?" Gaylor inquired.

Perriam's eyes narrowed. He hemmed apologetically, and in an extraordinarily harsh voice quite obviously intended to be noncommital, "Natalie Martineau is coming in to sign some transfers," he snapped, with the subsequent gimlet look and metallic laugh.

Then, his face softening,

"The little baggage is an hour late as usual," he subjoined.

Why it was that he should associate the woman he had seen in the street with Perriam's remark, Gaylor never troubled to reason. Perhaps because

the little man's change of expression tallied oddly enough with that blank stare he had seen on a befuddled boy's face a little while before.

At any rate he was aware of an anticipatory stir, of an interest only half-hearted in the desultory talk which followed. And at length when the door of the private office opened without a preliminary knock, he felt no surprise to see a little woman in black enter the room with hesitant footsteps.

"Awfully, aw-ful-ly sorry I'm late Stacey."

Hers was a slender little voice, limpid, irresponsible with a breathless quality in it. Gaylor saw her head, held high when she came in, droop before the almost fatuous grin on Perriam's face.

But when the broker presented his friend, and Gaylor repeated the other's curt "Mrs. Martineau" in his resonant musical voice—a voice to pique a woman's curiosity,—she smiled her tremulous smile. There was a lift of the chin, a sparkle of merriment, of goodwill, perhaps of challenge, in the big eyes, while she laid in his a hand so slim and white and fragile as immediately to induce a very benevolent and protective attitude on his part.

"Sorry to be late," she repeated, "but I've been pacing the corridor for the last ten minutes. You see, I saw you come in, Mr. Gaylor, and I knew who you were from Stacey's description,—knew, too, that you both would want some time to yourselves without a woman's intervening."

She paused, took a long breath, clasped her hands, and "I am quite too terribly ill at ease on Zion," came her explanation, apposite, it occurred to Gaylor, to nothing at all.

"The Woolworth Tower, you know," she explained when neither offered a comment. "I'd never been in the Woolworth Tower, and I happened to pass,—that's why I'm late. . . . It was stu-pendously lovely! Shafts of sunlight in a faraway haziness, all the shriekiness of the city stilled to a murmur, all the mix-up and ugliness reduced to a beautiful effect. That silly boy on the curb,—" Gaylor was pleasurably surprised at this admission that she had been aware of his presence when he passed her on the street,—"That boy and the others,—up in the Woolworth Tower, they were simply part of a beautiful effect. . . . It was like a mountain top, it *was* a mountain top,—a beautiful, blundersome mountain top named fittingly after the founder of a chain of five-and-ten-cent stores— But I didn't like it after all," —the chin fell, the smile faded,—"It frightened me. It made me dizzy. It was so—so comfortable to get down to earth again. . . . Quite too terribly ill at ease on Zion," she finished, dejectedly.

Perriam snapped his jaws. Although there lurked in his manner a hint of soppy beatification, his voice had a chill note when he drew some papers from a drawer.

"Sign here, Natalie."

Busy with the papers, she bent over the desk, sighing as with relief over the accomplishment of a bothersome task when Perriam refolded the documents.

"Beth. Steel has been good to me,—to us, hasn't it, Stacey?"

His only reply was a short "Coming to lunch with us?"

She shook her head.

"Thanks, awfully; but I can't. I've been neglecting my flower garden and determined to devote this afternoon to it. Have to catch a train within twenty minutes."

Gaylor was disappointed, distinctly disappointed. He could not but admit to himself that this ethereal little creature attracted to an alarming degree. It seemed injustice on her part to deny herself when a long afternoon stretched invitingly before them. He felt crestfallen. But as if assuringly she laid her hand in his again,—perhaps for an instant longer this time, and he caught the gleam of merriment in her eyes.

"I shall see you soon, Mr. Gaylor.

Tomorrow night, in fact, shan't I? The boxing match, you know"—

"Prizefight," Perriam broke in. "Welterweight championship. Haven't asked you yet. I'm backing Young Eddie Hanlon, a dark horse, at five to one, and he's going"—

"He's going," Mrs. Martineau interrupted, speaking low, but very quickly, as if at high tension. "He's going to have the shifty nigger who holds the title reeling stiff-kneed at the end of the third round. It'll be a real slugging match, they'll trade real wallops, and the dinge won't class, will he, Stacey? Young Eddie has a knock-out punch, he's no tapper. And it'll be no draw, but a knock-out finish, won't it, Stacey? . . . And after the fight we're going to meet you men at Jimmie Cummack's apartment to celebrate the victory."

Gaylor was taken aback at the sudden outbreak of prize-ring patois, but more at the strained look that played about the woman's eyes and mouth while she was speaking. It gave an effect of violent exertion. She finished with a long sigh, a bright smile.

"Until tomorrow, Mr. Gaylor."

Perriam, holding her arm in proprietary fashion, led her to the door.

III

"She induces a—a sort of spiritual genuflexion." Perriam snapped his jaws, darted his friend the piercing look, laughed, and flicked the ashes from his cigarette. "A sort of spiritual genuflexion. . . . *Garçon, encore deux cafés au kirsch.*"

The little French restaurant was deserted. For four hours the two had lingered over their luncheon in that atmosphere of genial exhilarance which hovers over the renewal of a prized comradeship.

Methodically Perriam stirred his coffee, and reiterated,

"A sort of spiritual genuflexion."

Then, a slow smile quite at odds with his usual quick flash of teeth, lighting his face,

"She lives in the suburbs," he went on. "Flower garden hemmed in by a high stone wall,—gravel paths fringed with hollyhocks, old-fashioned flowers, columbine, mignonette, foxglove, a lily pool,—you know the sort of thing. House all chintz and Chelsea and Chippendale. . . . Always wears black. Lots of chantilly lace, long trains, pearls."

He paused, and for the fourth time repeated,

"A sort of spiritual genuflexion."

To Gaylor the words trailed off into an agreeable hum. He submitted himself to a consideration as to exactly what relations obtained between his friend and this Natalie Martineau. The idea of an affiance was incompatible to both, and the mere suggestion of an affair of the heart on a less stable basis at once repellent and absurd.

Moreover, his speculations were overshadowed by an onset of nebulously agitant conjectures upon this woman who already had aroused more than a passing curiosity, more than a distinct attraction. The recollection of her fluttering smile, and nacreous skin, and little, lilting voice all evoked a vista of possibilities the more roseate for their haziness, possibilities for which her submissive glances, her rapt air, and especially the gleam of merriment that had darted from her eyes to his at their first handclasp all seemed to furnish an earnest.

Innately romantic, innately naif, Bayard Gaylor was as easily swept by the advancing tide of a sentimental encounter as he would have been swept to the espousal of any lost and picturesque cause such as had once made him the master strategist of an opera bouffe revolution. His mind reverted to the flower garden with its columbine and mignonette and to the little lady of the battlemented tower in his Morte Arthure.

He fell into a reverie, from which he was aroused only enough to respond with an absent-minded "Yes?" to Perriam's next remark, "Widow—Harvey Martineau's widow."

The little man leaned across the ta-

ble, and Gaylor was distracted from his meditations by an expression akin to mockery on the other's face.

"Harvey Martineau's widow, you know," he pronounced incisively, almost maliciously, and seemed to relish the look of astonishment, of angry remonstrance that coupled with a loud "Good Lord, no!" bespoke the recipience of a particularly unpleasant bit of news.

Harvey Martineau, classical dancer, "the most handsome man in the world," a Narcissus, an Adonis, a very Sun God, the idol of women prone to lionization, a sort of well-beloved laughing-stock—Gaylor remembered once having seen him cavort in fleshings before an adulatory throng, remembered, too, having heard how eventually the sun god took on adipose tissue to a ludicrous extent, and married one of his erstwhile adorers, only to die a few months later as the result of a too strenuous fast . . . Now to realize that Natalie Martineau had been this one loyal adorer of a pink-and-white-cheeked mime! It was farcical, a cruel joke, something to engender disgust. . . .

He was surprised to notice Perriam viewing him with what appeared to be distinct displeasure, so, without venturing a comment, he turned away from the sharp eyes, and looked out into a street whose quiet was enlivened by scores of flags floating in the onsettling twilight.

Perriam followed his glance, and, as if eager to change the topic, "Going to give up the diplomatic service for active duty on the fighting line, eh?" he asked. "Got your commission yet?"

Gaylor shook his head.

"The usual red tape. But it will materialize soon; a captaincy or majority, I imagine. Expect to be called to Washington in a week or two."

"All agog for the glow of the thing, eh?" Perriam snorted. "Taps, reveille, gallant deeds, victory—and forget the humdrum ugliness. We all get the fever in one of its phases sometimes. Take women, for instance. There we crave loveliness, ardor, charm, delicacy, and we get—that is, if we're dam' lucky we get—some little jade who looks well, dresses well, dances well, kisses well—kisses with an innate flair for the thing tempered by acquired dexterity. Natalie"—he lit another cigarette—"is an excellent waltzer and fair at the fox trot. . . . *Garçon, encore deux cafés au kirsch.*"

He waited without a word until the coffee was served, then poured the liqueur carefully into the cup, and applied a lighted match to it. Faint blue, shot with orange and pale gold, a flame arose.

"There you have it," he went on, "in a nutshell, in a demitasse. Color, a glow, a luminous tinge over the drabness of things, luminous and illusory—always illusory. And the best we can get is to realize the gentle irony, the element of the sublime in the futility of it all. Wasn't there a man of sorrows who preached all his life against the Philistines, and is worshipped solely by them to-day?"

Gaylor listened attentively.

Here was Perriam in one of his unusual moods, at one of the moments when he seemed to be trying in vain to fight his way out of a quagmire.

"Did you notice," he continued, his voice falling almost to a whisper, "did you notice the way her head droops, and her hands flutter out as if she were always wanting to comfort someone? A low-voiced, unassuming, worshipful little thing. Makes you feel humble and unworthy by the very *'Domine, non sum dignus'* look in her eyes. . . . No business head, though. I'm taking care of her stock transactions."

He fell silent, and a rapturous grin overspread the puffy face.

At length abruptly he collected himself, straightened in his chair, snapped his jaws.

"We'll take in a baseball game tomorrow afternoon before the fight. There's a shortstop on the visiting team you must see. Does some brilliant all-around playing. Fielding faultless. Last time I saw him he hammered out

two doubles and a single at the bat, and scored three runs. He was a dark horse, too, at the beginning of the season. And speaking about dark horses, I picked up a colt for a song the other day. Best two-year-old of the batch. I'm willing to give three to one that the beast will have all the big stakes cinched for the next few years. . . . *Garçon, l'addition.*"

IV

STACEY PERRIAM won five thousand dollars at the boxing match. The dark horse he had backed was acclaimed a new welterweight champion amidst the cheers, and oaths, and roars of a crazily enthusiastic mob. And Gaylor, who had but a half-hearted interest in the proceedings, stared at his friend, perplexed by the almost fanatical gleam in the pale gray eyes, and the tremor in the voice which murmured again and again:

"I picked the winner."

Perriam, moreover, was patting his arm, clasping his hand, and hovering about him exactly like a flurrisome fowl.

Not a little embarrassed, Gaylor finally turned away to the other two who comprised the party, young Jimmie Cummack, who, having but recently attained a majority and an inheritance, was plunging into urban gaieties in princely fashion, and Addison Bates—"Lord Chesterfield" Bates, as he had been dubbed in acknowledgment of an old-world grand manner still retained now, when, close to the three score and ten mark, the dandy of a past generation had become a spruce little dotard, dyed of mustache, massaged of waistline.

"Lord Chesterfield" was deep in a discussion upon the place due in history to the Marquis of Queensberry when Perriam, imperturbable again, interposed.

"The girls will be waiting," he announced, snapped his jaws, and led the way out of the place. . . .

While they were driving to young Jimmie's apartment in that youth's ornate limousine, the conversation dwindled to a dissertation by "Lord Chesterfield" upon the dulcineas of yesteryear. Perriam appeared deep in dreamy abstraction. Cummack, new to the rôle of a full-fledged man-about-town, maintained a diffident silence. And Bates addressed himself to Gaylor, who felt a genuine fondness for this superannuated Lothario.

"Lord Chesterfield" had none of the old beau's boresome tendencies to prate of bygone conquests, and hint at gallantries still in progress. He had long since put behind him affairs of the heart, and devoted himself exclusively to a friendship free of carnal aspects with a Mrs. Sarah Hodge—battered siren, lorelei in the gloaming, whom Gaylor remembered as a heavy and handsome blonde of some fifty years, a Joan tenderly protective in her attitude toward her Darby.

Bates was disparaging the twentieth century woman when the automobile came to a halt.

"Which of them," he cried, "which of them at fifty will be a magnificent wreck like my Sarah? Natalie, of course," he declared, stepping out to the curbstone, and Gaylor followed quickly that he might hear, "Natalie, of course, will never be a wreck, magnificent or otherwise. But then, there's only one Natalie."

Ill equipped for the rôle of host on a really sumptuous scale, young Cummack, stammering with embarrassment, led them into his recently acquired apartment. The servants had been dismissed for the night, and all was very still, and very, very august in the great room they entered, a room furnished, save for such modern appurtenances as a phonograph and grand piano, in regal, Italianate damasks that made young Jimmie appear out of place, Perriam more the dapper vulgarian, Bates more shrivelled than ever. Gaylor alone seemed at ease, and above the surroundings.

The notes of silvery chimes which had been introduced in lieu of a doorbell, rang out.

"The ladies!"

Lord Chesterfield rose to his feet with alacrity, and a flourish. All stirred expectantly, for the feminine element had been wanting. And Gaylor looked alertly toward the doorway, eager for his first impression of Harvey Martineau's widow in this incongruous entourage.

Lord Chesterfield's magnificent wreck was the first to appear. Ablaze in the trophies of yesteryear—diamonds dignified by their out-of-date settings as was the turquoise blue of her gown by its chaste black overdrapings—she looked like a valkyr, *hors de combat*, and some fifty pounds overweight. There was something touching in her greeting of Bates, in the old man's jaunty dependence, in the way she laid a puffy, be-ringed hand on his shoulder, something poignant which tended to antidote the disagreeable flamboyancy of the woman who followed.

Young Cummack was as yet not seasoned enough to light upon any but the most obvious type as the lady of his choice. It was well known that he was trying to extricate himself from the obligations ensuable to an impulsive pledging of vows with the tall young woman who now, in flaming scarlet, very black of hair and eyes, swept in, demanding at the top of her lungs by what right her suitor had neglected to telephone at a specified hour that afternoon. The boy's face went red. He broke into a series of stammering explanations only to be silenced by a tragic roll of the eyes, a mournful "You don't understand women, James. . . ." And just then Mrs. Martineau slipped quietly into the room.

Gaylor had always associated black velvet and lace with benevolent old ladies of the Victorian era. But now with Natalie's shoulders and arms outvying in lustre a rope of pearls that hung to her knees, the costume took on a different aspect. The golden brown hair, dressed high, shone like a saint's nimbus, became part of a certain shimmer about the woman.

Eyes bright, cheeks flushed, she made straight for Gaylor's side with a low "Hello Chevalier Bayard!" in answer to his "How is your mignon majesty tonight?"

She seemed to realize that he and she were set apart from the rest, and yet looked over her shoulders at the others in a worshipful way. And he noticed how a look of awe passed over Perriam's face, over Cummack's and Bates' and how, meeting it, a shadow seemed to flit across her face, while the corners of her mouth drooped, for an instant, plaintively.

"Brandy and soda for Addison and me," Mrs. Hodge hinted politely, "and nothing but vermouth and orange juice for Natalie, of course."

Young Jimmie, abeam as host, bustled among decanters and glasses. Soda fizzed and ice tinkled for some minutes.

They talked desultorily, Sarah Hodge's soothing, "There, there," resounding above the lady in scarlet's, "You don't understand women, James."

Cummack's betrothed refused to be appeased in her just wrath over his delinquency, until at length, Mrs. Hodge, habitually the peacemaker, took an arm of each and led them to a window-seat at the further end of the vast room, whence, above a clamorous altercation, the croon of her "There, there, Cora—there, there, Jimmie," floated over to the others.

Natalie was seated on a great divan, between Perriam and Gaylor. Little Bates enthroned himself pompously in a Renaissance armchair.

He looked over at Mrs. Hodge, and then, contemptuously, at Cora.

"Natalie, I ask you, will she ever be a magnificent wreck like my Sarah there? What's wrong with the women of today, I wonder? Always baiting and haggling for matrimony, always quarreling, always jumping at conclusions. The ladies of my time jumped at chances, but never at conclusions. Take that one, making herself unhappy, foregoing the colorful experiences of life to—"

Natalie's laughter broke in on the tirade. It was the first time Gaylor

had heard her laugh, a little lute-like ripple, faint as her voice, and with a lilt in it, and a caressful, sob-like quality.

"Dear Chesterfield, you're wrong. Cora has had experiences—experiences like her gowns, quite too enliveningly *décolleté*. And Cora isn't unhappy. Misunderstood folk—"

"Aren't ever unhappy," Gaylor interrupted. "They go through life blissfully, getting themselves misunderstood. As for haggling for matrimony, why not? It's the men who have made wifehood sacrosanct. Women realize the material advantages of the connubial state. In itself, it glosses over a multitude of lapses, and—"

"And the hand that rocks the cradle fools the world," Mrs. Martineau put in.

Little Bates waxed indignant. "But this constant, cold calculation, Natalie! There's a fundamental law against it. It eliminates the element of colorful stress—all that constrains, urges, impels. Too much of anything—"

Her laughter interposed. "Right you are, Lord Chesterfield! All excesses are horrible; moderation in excess the most horrible of all."

There was a little assumed flippancy to her manner which jarred, but only slightly, for the spiritual quality of her beauty, of her voice, of her very gestures, rendered migratory a somewhat platitudinous cynicism. "As for laws, they're abominable things. They're all wrong. They were never meant to be. They're—"

"The typographical errors in the book of life," Gaylor finished for her.

"But," for the first time Perriam's voice resounded, colorless, metallic, curt, "you can't ignore a sense of responsibility." The jaws snapped. The pale gray eyes darted from one to the other.

"Responsibility!" Natalie echoed after a pause, and Gaylor wondered why her voice quavered. "Responsibility is so ter-ri-fyingly—"

"Let's all buck the tiger." From across the room, his difficulties settled for the nonce, young Jimmie broke in.

V

"A WELCOME suggestion!" Little Bates hopped from his chair. "Roulette! A gentleman's game. Pure chance, and no opportunity for a twopenny gambler's twopenny skill!"

Alert for the game, Cummack sped into the next room to arrange the paraphernalia, followed by Bates and Perriam, who trotted across the floor, clasping and unclasping his hands, full of the suppressed fervor which the prospect of a game of chance always provoked. Natalie slipped to the piano, and began to play "The Man Who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo," while in a cracked contralto Mrs. Hodge hummed the popular song of years ago, until the last note was struck, when, bending over with a majestic flourish, she drew a hundred-dollar bill from her stocking. "Two tries at fifty each, and on twenty-six because it's the age I'd like to be, and half of what I am. Everybody ready!" The gambling glint lay in her faded eyes. "Everybody ready and the host's the banker!"

Gaylor followed her reluctantly, for Mrs. Martineau remained at the piano, and it was evident that she was not to take part in the game. He wanted to grasp this first opportunity of talking with her, and joined the others, determined to scatter his chips over the board two or three times, and retire from the game.

Cora, propitiated at last, her head leaning against her affianced's shoulder, her mournful eyes pleading for misunderstanding, was only an onlooker. The others placed their bets, and the game was on, Gaylor carrying out his resolution to throw his chips carelessly over the table.

It annoyed him to win to the same degree that it delighted Sarah Hodge. For from the next room came a melody from "Fra Diavolo," and he caught sight of Natalie Martineau's lovely little upturned profile. He played on

for some twenty minutes, while stakes mounted, and the interest began to center on Perriam's wagers.

Finally, his departure unnoticed, he rose from the table.

She did not hear him enter, and as he approached her, he became unwilling to interrupt her happy absorption. It was enough just to watch her and listen to her playing, so he made his way to a curtained alcove at the other end of the room where a divan and its many cushions invited. There, leaning back in a comfortable half-doze he looked at her through a rift in the portières, and gave himself up to vague, agreeable reverie.

What was there about this woman which reconciled him to her affiliation with a crew of trifling gadabouts? Why did he feel but little repugnance to the idea of her having been the wife of a sensational footlight cavorter with a smirking smile? What was it that made men's voices drop, and their eyes grow soft before her? And why at such moments did a shadow cross her face? Why, when he thought of her, did his mind revert to that ideal of callow days, the lady waving a scarf from a battlemented tower? Why, above all else did he, for the first time in his life, find the prospect of marriage infinitely inviting now, as he sat there, listening to her playing, ever so softly, forgotten strains from "The Trumpeter of Sakkingen," "Die Fledermaus," "The Bohemian Girl."

Abruptly he was aroused from his reverie when Mrs. Martineau ended with a cacophonous bang, and clenched her hands, a frown puckering the pretty forehead.

Her attention was riveted upon the voices in the next room, grown louder now, and more excited.

Stakes had mounted considerably.

Perriam's sharp, "A thousand on thirty-five" resounded, topped by an angry exclamation from Cora "Stop plunging! I'm hungry, and what's the sense of such big bets in a friendly game, anyhow?"

Perriam lost, and after a moment his voice rang out again:

"Fifteen hundred on thirty-five!"

Glancing at Natalie, Perriam thought she seemed pale. She was biting her lips, and the hands remained clenched. Again Perriam lost.

"Two thousand!"

Consternation leapt into the big amber eyes of the woman at the piano.

She sprang from the chair, sped to the doorway, and as if all her energies were concentrated upon the deft manipulation of a successful appeal, her hands fluttered out, her voice remonstrated plaintively:

"I'm head-achy and hungry, and you've all been neglecting me shamefully!"

And the appeal was successful.

Gaylor heard Perriam's brusque "We've been at it long enough," Jimmie's apologetic "So sorry," Mrs. Hodge's soothing "There, there." Chips were counted, accounts settled. There was talk of supper, and little Bates volunteered to "concoct something in a chafing dish, something with a paradisian tang. . . . Come, my Sarah, and assist me."

His absence as yet unnoted, Gaylor remained in the alcove, unable to still certain vague doubts which assailed him, trying satisfactorily to explain Mrs. Martineau's very evident agitation at the turn of events about the roulette wheel. Intermingled with an indistinct murmuring, the clink of dishes in the kitchen reached him.

After a time, through the rift in the portières, he saw Cummack and his misunderstood one enter the room. Just within his range of vision they halted.

The girl was taking her affianced to task for his inordinate wagers, and he expostulated in vain.

"Couldn't have stopped if I'd wanted to, honey. Have to give a man a chance to retrieve."

"But you might have lost, and you haven't so much money that you can throw it away."

"Let's not quarrel, hon." The boy, as if succumbing against his will to her

opulent good looks, slipped an arm about her. "You know where my gambling winnings go."

Immediately the dusky eyes softened. "How much did you win?"

"About two thou, hon."

"And all of that for me?"

"All of that and then some."

Placated with the assurance, she leaned her head on his shoulder and yielded somewhat grudgingly to his embrace, but only until it threatened to disarrange her elaborate coiffure. Then releasing herself, she became matter-of-fact again. "Let's go and hurry the old birds up with their cooking." And the two returned to the other room.

Gaylor, after they had disappeared, fell again into a pleasant languor, all misgivings concerning the woman who dominated his thoughts quelled by the scene which seemed to have enacted itself for the sole purpose of demonstrating how impossible it was to bring Natalie Martineau into any sort of rapport with the crassness of her milieu. A proneness to indefinite, delicious cogitation stole over him. He half-closed his eyes. . . . Columbine and hollyhock in an old-fashioned garden. A tiny hand, a glistening shoulder. There was something to be said in favor of marriage at that. . . . A lily-pool. Amber eyes and a tremulous smile—and again the conviction that marriage might present a prospect full of charm.

A lute-like treble broke into his reverie. He saw Perriam and Natalie enter. Like the couple which had preceded them, they stopped just where, through the curtains, he could readily view them. Why was it that at the sight of them he fell prey to an uneasy foreboding? Why did it strike him that they were like marionettes moved by strings in the hands of some invisible, antagonistic force, and brought before these curtains to enact a sequel to a scene in a mock drama that he had just witnessed?

"Want to show you a new step, pet." Perriam trotted to the phonograph.

In a second, shrill strains from a popular musical comedy resounded. "There's a little swing to it that you have to get." He encircled the woman's waist. In the pale gray eyes lay that almost fanatical gleam which Gaylor had noticed when the welterweight championship was decided.

Around and around the room they danced, the man in the alcove remarking how each time Natalie passed through the space visible to him, she appeared paler, more drawn about the mouth, and obviously under a strain for all her feverish peals of laughter.

At first she was unable to seize upon the intricacies of the step, stumbling prettily, shaking her head, but rising finally to her partner's exhortations to "get the knack of it, pet." All smiles, they glided smoothly about the room, although her eyes were fixed upon the phonograph and the lids fluttered as with a sense of deliverance when the music stopped.

"Now for a waltz."

He made for another dark disk, but clinging to his arm, she drew him away.

"Stacey, dear, one moment while I scold you."

She raised her hands to his shoulders, threw back her head, smiled up into his face.

"Why play for such high stakes, dear?"

Beaming, the little man stroked his mustache.

"Three thou ahead on the day, Natalie. A bit red letter, that."

Nestling closer to him, she sighed, "But you're such a plunger!"

Grandiloquently, munificently he chucked her under the chin:

"Always safe to follow the hunch when the plunging's for you, pet."

Her smile quivered. Ecstatically, she clasped her hands:

"Three thousand and all for me? Stacey, dear, but you're kind! And I'd been worrying about that mortgage thing next week, and those dividends not being declared, and—"

He silenced her with a grand sweep of the arm that buried her face in his shoulder.

"Natalie, this year with you has been

so unique, so—" And the crisp voice faltered into huskiness before the glow of her great eyes, before the gesture, like a benediction, which entwined her arms about his neck. "Natalie, you induce a—a sort of spiritual genuflexion."

At the homage in his voice, her face became dispirited. She moved toward the door.

"Let's go and help the dear ancients with their cooking, shall we, Stacey?"

And presently they disappeared.

Gaylor sat up with a quick spring, eager to throw off a mood of sullen stupor. This, he was forced to acknowledge, had been a bit of a shock. And yet he felt no disgust, only a blank bewilderment, a feeling of injustice meted out to a certain youngster, who, years before, had worshipped at the shrine of a lady all-good, all-wise, all-beautiful, encountered in a volume of Malory.

Loudly, distinctly he addressed himself:

"Better quit mooning, and join the others over the chafing dish."

VI

In the weeks that followed, Gaylor found himself often in the company of Natalie Martineau. He was genuinely fond of Perriam. Whenever circumstances brought him to New York it had been his custom of years to associate almost constantly with the little broker. And now that Natalie's presence came to be taken as a matter of course, not only, as at first, was he reconciled to it, but with each ensuing day, he grew more keenly to enjoy it.

His curiosity revivified itself. For it struck him that the woman was quite aware of his resolution to cast off all reverence from his attitude toward her, and correspondingly pleased.

At odd moments he would catch a provocative gleam in the great eyes, a smile wherein a challenge lay, a sub-rosa effort at ingratiation which perplexed to the same degree that it delighted him. There were times when she seemed purely the mistress type, no more, no less, a sort of composite miniature of all the great sirens, with an appeal to the senses only intensified by her littleness and fragility.

On the other hand, always that look of humble idolization in men's eyes when they lit on her, always the drawn lines about her lips in response, and always, above all else, a strange, vague exaltation perpetually hovering over her, gave her an effect almost of incorporeality, of a being somewhat carried away by the loveliness of a jaded world, an effect enhanced by her fluttering hands, by her breathless little voice, by her habit of dwelling with a long-drawn "stupendous" or "co-lossal" upon extravagant attributives.

Gradually the two drifted into a stealthy intimacy. Now and again there were moments snatched for an interchange of whispers, colloquies unnoticed amidst the loud talk and laughter of crowded dining tables. She had asked him several times to visit her, with Perriam, in the suburban cottage whose chintz-hung walls and flower garden had become, by constant visualization, almost familiar to him.

But he had persistently hedged at the invitation.

Perriam must be considered. Difficulties might present themselves. Moreover, he who knew women well knew, too, a fair one's instinctive predilection for her Damon's Pythias. It was enough, for the time being, to let his interest augment with the flashes of self-revelation she would vouchsafe at intervals.

Orphaned in babyhood, she told him once, she had been "put in the charge of two maiden aunties quite gor-geously mid-Victorian except for a tendency for unearthing geniuses. I was brought up in a *milieu* of discoveries—new poets, new painters, new Greek dancers."

He had looked up quickly. It was her first indirect allusion to Harvey Martineau.

At another time she spoke of "my poor husband," lingering affectionately

over the words. Strangely enough, he felt no resentment. While as for Perriam, they discussed him often with an entire lack of constraint.

"He's a vulgarian," Gaylor commented once, "but a mystic and sybarite as well. He loves beauty, and really thinks to find its supreme manifestation in wine, horses, women, bets and Broadway. He's a puzzle, but essentially lovable."

"He's Don Quixote de la Mancha, and Sancho Panza all in one," she murmured after a pause. "He's the crazed nobleman for whom inns are castles, windmills giants—and the vulgar esquire who translates the vagaries into stupid prose. To Don Quixote, Broadway's an Eldorado, to Sancho Panza just the usual good old gay white way. To Sancho Panza a show girl is a lot of class, and a lot of pep, to Don Quixote a fair unattainable in distress. Prizefights are romantic jousts to Don Quixote, and to Sancho—well, just prizefights. Stacey is inexpressibly dear to me"—she leaned close in a quick burst of confidence—"but I'm not over-keen about the fox trot."

It was Perriam, in fact, who put a seal of rectitude upon these clandestine conversations, of which he seemed at once to approve and to be utterly unaware, while at the same time his attitude of benevolent, fussy concern over Gaylor became more apparent with each passing day. It was as if he were making a god of this good-looking, suntanned, and overwhelmingly superior friend of his, as if Gaylor had become in his eyes an illustrious personage who could do no wrong. And this constant obsequiousness grew painfully embarrassing to its recipient: it commenced to smack of the cringe, the grovel.

"Lord Chesterfield" Bates and his magnificent wreck were invariably present at the successive festivals.

For the rest, young Cummack, his Cora, and others of their ilk—a motley crew of moneyed free-and-easys—composed an entourage utterly incongruous to all its cynosure, Mrs. Martineau suggested.

There were roulette parties, long sessions at pirate bridge, motoring trips to the horse races and dog shows, baseball games, theaters, midnight revues, and of supreme importance, since Perriam engineered all the ceremonials, dancing.

To Gaylor, it was pitiful to hear his friend enter into excited discussion as to the respective merits of Marimba and jazz bands. A temporary allegiance to the quasi-Guatemalans faded before the less subdued charms of the clangorous cornets. And from then on it was jazz bands. Gaylor would remain through the din of them only because of the peculiar fascination of watching Natalie trip by in Perriam's arms, all solemnity in her endeavor to keep step, stumbling prettily, and with a look of utter exhaustion on her face.

From one feature, however, of this perpetual frolic chase, Gaylor derived unreserved pleasure. Often the five of them—Bates, Mrs. Hodge, Natalie, Perriam and he—would set out on long automobiling trips through Long Island, Westchester, or the Ramapo Hills. Lush meadowlands and clear skies, the love-duets of nesting warblers, a redolence from blossoming fruit-trees, all furnished a background suitable to an idyl. Natalie's carillon laughter rang out whole-heartedly. Snatches of song came to her lips. And the outing would come to a pleasurable close when they drove through a dew-laden dusk to conclude the day with dinner at Rémy's.

An oak-bordered driveway and clusters of pines hid this far-famed hostelry from the eyes of the uninitiated passer-by. Only an inner circle knew the Gallic succulence of Rémy's dishes, the superexcellence, beyond a gourmet's liveliest hopes, of his vintage wines.

Only an inner circle was familiar with the glassed-in porch where diners sat, with the *cabinets particuliers* on the upper floor, with the rumors of somewhat lively episodes enacted therein.

Rémy himself, a *maître d'hotel,* with the usual pomaded mustache and starched chef's cap tipped over one ear, knew all his patrons by name. When

Perriam's car approached, he would come capering through the hallway with many a shrill *"Madame Natalie! C'est Madame Natalie!"* and Gaylor grew to enjoy the hours at the little inn best of all those spent with Natalie. The more aspiring of the ladies beyond the social pale frequented there, quite at ease among members of ultra smart cliques. And the genial warmth of the atmosphere invested vapid-faced flappers with an ingenuous appeal, stony-eyed dowagers with a mellow charm.

Then, too, there was Pantaleone Roselli, the inn's most regular patron, opera idol of a generation ago, world-famed Rodolfo and Rhadames, whose "voice of molten gold" was a tradition, and who, when in his cups, deplored the fact that he had not been born a baritone, stretched himself to the fullest extent of his five feet three, and trotting from table to table broke into conversations with a hoarse *"Segredezza!"* hummed bits of Iago and Falstaff, and asked whether he did not look a little like Victor Maurel. . . .

Gaylor liked the atmosphere of the place, demure, dubious and essentially whole-hearted. And, it was here, too, that he first glimpsed the real Natalie Martineau, the woman's *vraie vérite*.

VII

He had received word from Washington requiring his presence there within a week, and the news promoted a sentimental mood that intensified with each successive hour of a day spent in a ramble over Long Island, and an incidental hour at the Piping Rock races. The occasion struck him in the light of a preliminary leave-taking. He fell into an agreeable melancholy, into a silence that communicated itself by degrees to the others, until only Sarah's soft "There, there" or an occasional remark from Perriam, whose eyes darted constantly from Natalie to Gaylor, mingled with the methodical chug of the motor.

Gradually the glow of late afternoon settled over the countryside. The sun became a blood red. Clouds gathered at the horizon like huge clusters of liquid iridescence adrift in a sapphirine mist, with little ribbon-like streams of light shifting among them, faintly tremulous, and assuming tints of lilac and pale gold, that deepened slowly into a riot of gorgeous purples and reds and oranges. A warm sheen spread over a world whose very fabric seemed steeped in pellucid flame. And yielding only in moiety to the atmospheric allure, Gaylor felt that a culminant touch was lacking to the scene. There should have been—exactly what he couldn't say—perhaps a hawk sweeping in long, steady circles among the clouds, perhaps the tinkle of an angelus bell, perhaps Natalie's head nestled against his shoulder.

In vain he tried to throw off his melancholy humor. It was a relief finally to draw up before Rémy's inviting portals.

As they entered, it struck him that there was an undercurrent of excitement in the air, an unwonted effect of scurry and bustle. Before the door, lined up among costly, foreign machines that appeared to hold aloof in disdain were two motor busses of the sightseeing variety. No Rémy stood at the door to greet them with an effusive,

"Madame Natalie! C'est Madame Natalie!"

And whereas hitherto music had been scoffed at as a bait for patronage, today, from somewhere in the upper regions of the house, interspersed with maudlin huzzahs and a thumping of feet, came fiddle scrapings, and a voice singing *"La femme de feu, la cui, la cui, la cuisinière."*

In the hallway they passed a man who furnished a keynote to the unusual stir, a long, lean, bony man in the uniform of a French naval captain with a very red nose, a very bald head, a very fierce mustache, the mildest of blue eyes and a desolate air. Evidently in his cups to an unaccustomed degree, he produced that impression of overwhelming dignity which so often accompanies unsteady legs. When he saw Natalie he gave her a long, appraising

stare. The dull eyes twinkled, and slowly one lid lowered into a dismal and diffident wink. . . . Meanwhile, a burst of cheers resounded, feet thumped, and for an instant Rémy appeared at the head of the stairs, his face purple, his cap askew.

The glassed-in porch was deserted. And the habitués of the place, apathetic and fastidious as a rule, thronged the staircase, spoke in hushed voices, appeared at high tension. Even the waiters had lost their suavity. The one who always served Perriam's party trotted over on tiptoe to volunteer the information that "Monsieur Rémy entertained today forty sailors from a visiting French battleship—*et tout cela s'agite de*"—

A chorus of cheers silenced him. An ecstatic look crept over his blockesh face, an ecstatic look that Gaylor was amazed to see reflect itself on all the faces around him. It was astounding, it was laughable to realize that the excitement had been created merely by the instrumentality of a picturesque uniform in sublimating a few dull-headed citizens to a heroic scale, that an ecstasy stole over effete folk who, at high emotional pitch, tiptoed up the stairs to view a few sailors getting drunk over Rémy's vintage wines.

He took Natalie's arm, and followed by the others, made for a table. But Sarah Hodge left the hallway reluctantly, and when she was about to seat herself, of a sudden she shook her head determinedly, and hurried toward the staircase.

In a few minutes she was back, red of face, out of breath, and with tears in her eyes. And when Bates sprang up in concern, instead of patting his shoulder with a whispered blandishment, she laid one pudgy hand on the table, patted it with the other, and murmured, as if to collect herself, her crooning, "There, there."

But when the little man drew out a chair for her, again she shook her head, "Upstairs—the sailors . . . you can't sit here while they— Upstairs! The sailors!"

Gaylor succumbed to an impulse to join the crowd. In some obscure fashion he felt that matters were approaching a critical juncture. Why was it that Natalie seemed to hang back a little when she rose? There was a scarce perceptible shadow beneath her eyes. She was pale, and her lips drooped ever so slightly, as if in foreboding.

Some forty people were gathered around the banisters in the upper hall—men in riding togs, cutaways, khaki, women in costumes ranging from satins to tweeds, members of exclusive old families, mingled with ostentatious *nouveaux riches*, irreproachable matrons standing side by side with ladies discriminately loose in characters and favors—a motley assemblage. Each seemed the personification of a bated breath. All were peering through a half opened door at the sailors who slouched about a long table, in the lazy contentment induced by a well-filled stomach.

Gaylor noticed that some waiters held a coign of vantage near the door, that Pantaleone Roselli, the antiquated tenor, had mounted several steps of the second flight so that he towered over the heads of the others, and appeared as tall as the Victor Maurel, of whom he was evidently thinking, as he frowned, and snarled, and beamed like an Iago in a benevolent mood. . . .

A little besabled blonde stood arm in arm with a little besabled brunette.

"A bunch of nuts," the blonde whispered, and Gaylor agreed.

Natalie, meanwhile, had slipped her arm out of his. In apparent uneasiness she edged her way through the crowd, her head hung dejectedly. The mournful captain, now at a tottering stage, espied her.

"Madame est francaise?" he intoned, as if in sepulchral cajolery.

And Gaylor, disappointed, wondered why she shook her head without smiling, why in her eyes lay no cordial response as she threaded her way toward an inconspicuous spot where the hall terminated in a French window with an arched top.

Of a sudden, one of the more intre-

pid among the onlookers, pushed the door wide open. And a tremor like a little curling wave on a still expanse of water, passed over the crowd. Undersized striplings, for the most part, the forty that were disclosed, undersized and doltish of countenance, their eyes bleary with wine. And yet they provoked a tug at the heartstrings. Everyone felt it. Gaylor felt it—a sort of reaching out toward these who after all were fighting men. And Natalie slipped her little hand in his, interlaced her fingers with his.

After dinner ceremonies were evidently in progress. A boy rose, a thin-faced, eager-eyed boy, and began to sing a *chant de départ*. Over the crowd again there passed the ripple of movement, and Gaylor sensed the emotional pitch mounting several degrees. For although the voice was thin and quavering, although he sang a somewhat mawkish refrain, nevertheless it was a song of a distant homeland, and the boy was very young. A woman sighed. Surreptitiously a waiter wiped his eyes. Sarah Hodge gave a little sob. Several notes off key the boy finished. Then someone else sobbed, and Rémy, his cap awrier than ever, dashed across the room, threw his fat arms about the sailor, embraced him with Latin abandon. *"Vive la France!"* a bystander shouted. *"Vive l'Amérique!"* came an answering chorus. At the end of the hall, near the arched French window, Natalie clung to Gaylor, her worshipful glance reaching him through the glitter of tears. In effulgent vermilions and purples the light of the setting sun streamed over the crowd, transforming trivial folk into figures of romance. Finally, as one man, the sailors rose, and joined the others in the hall. And then pandemonium broke loose.

The air resounded with huzzahs. There was a great deal of handshaking, of laughing and crying, while the sailors, a little carried away by a new sense of importance, basked in the adulation, bowed, smirked, cheered.

And the one man in the assemblage who actually suggested deeds of gallantry as he stood straight, tall, knightly beside a little woman who shrank away from the hubbub, wondered why it was that his knees felt a bit shaky as he watched what was no more than an outburst of senseless hysteria, an onrush, among an effete contingent, of mob enthusiasm for the uniformed man. For here in the varicolored luminosity he, too, felt a ready response to the fife-and-drum aspect of war, to all that was bugle calls, thrilling deeds, floating banners, resounding cheers, to all that was light-hearted, high-hearted. And dimly he was aware of an inner significance.

For here in this mixed assemblage, where a waiter stood at ease beside a dowager of fine-grained lineage, here was an outpouring of that feeling of fellowship generally so scrupulously hidden. Here was a common emotion, a surrender to an elemental something deeper and stronger than duty or personal honor.

These people were succumbing to an ecstasy, an intoxication impulse, to a phase of all that which promotes a great, primitive craving to adore—to adore, no matter what, a god, a woman, a homeland, nothing at all. And these people, too, appeared to be floundering about in search of a pivot to the situation. . . .

He never knew what it was that made him turn so abruptly to Natalie. At any rate, whatever it was obliterated itself instantaneously from his mind. Her head was bowed, her face hidden. All he could see was a little tendril of hair curling itself about a pink ear, a tiny expanse of white temple, delicately veined, marbly, and yet with no marbly immobility and coldness. On the moment he yielded to this woman's purely physical appeal, to—

"Madame est française?"

The boy who had sung was facing Natalie, blinking, frowning perplexedly, upon his face that look of reverence which a sight of her always produced.

Gaylor felt a tremor run through the little hand on his arm. . . . *"Gentille, gentille,"* came a dirge-like mumble. The cadaverous captain loomed large

before them. And Natalie, avoiding his glance, shrank further toward the window whence a tumult of color poured straight from the heart of the setting sun.

Silhouetted against it, she looked like a little saint standing before a miraculously stained glass window in a church which disavowed all creeds.

The boy continued to stare at her in dumbfounded fashion, the captain to mumble his *"Gentille, gentille."* . . .

In the confusion everyone else overlooked the group at the window. Gaylor caught sight of Lord Chesterfield chattering in the grand manner with a waiter, of Sarah Hodge patting all the sailors on the back, of Perriam, standing aloof, his eyes on Natalie.

At length Rémy reappeared, in a transport now. He had lost his cap, and his pomaded hair its sleekness. Seething with Gallic *élan* he capered about the place, and as if trying to find an outlet for his fervor, and at the same time to satisfy a hidden longing of years, seized this as an auspicious occasion to embrace all the pretty women in the place, his rapt air justifying the familiarity as for the propagation of democracy, and the welfare of France. Finally he espied the little figure at the end of the hall, hopped, strutted, leaped, made for her . . . and pulled up with an astounded "Hein!" when she raised her face, wide-eyed, startlingly white, all ashimmer.

For a moment be blinked and gasped. Then, summoning forth a histrionic flair to carry him over the situation, he bowed over her hand in a way to proclaim theirs the interrelation of lady and vassal, kissed her finger tips with feudal fervor, raised his arm aloft.

"Cèst Madame Natalée," he cried. *"Vive Madame Natalée!"*

"Madame Natalie," some one repeated.

There was a giggle, a cough, and then, on the instant, silence. Everyone's eyes were fixed upon the woman over whose slight form a radiance of rose color and violet played, a little woman with a halo of fair hair glistening over her brow, with tears in her eyes, and the mouth of a child. People caught their breaths. Faces changed. This was the apex of an emotional onrush and Natalie the pivotal figure of the whole episode. Gaylor, however, scarce noticed the subjugation in everyone's eyes. He was concerned with that little lustrous tendril curled about a pink ear, with her fleshly appeal, and a recrescent conviction that here was a woman to be taken lightly, joyfully.

"A bunch of nuts!" The besabled blonde was blowing her nose and wiping her eyes.

"Vive Madame Natalie!" Rémy cried again, and the sailors surged around her all agape and grinning.

Pantaleone Roselli still towered over the crowd. He had discarded Iago for Falstaff now, smiled a broad, affable, unctuous, lecherous smile, and clasped his hands over his stomach, as if he were sublimating the diminutive protuberance there to the dimensions of Sir John's monumental paunch.

It was the gaunt captain who capped the situation.

"Mes enfants, mes enfants," he growled so formidably that the sailors gave way before him.

Lifting a hand, he patted his unadorned pate, ran his fingers through ambrosial locks that were not, and finally in hollow, sepulchral tones, as if he were making a roll-call of wraiths, *"A la très bonne,"* he groaned, *"A la très belle."* And with a great, guttural growl, *"Salut en immortalitè!"*

He lurched, regained his balance, smiled as if the effort were tearing the ligaments of his face, subjoined a *"C'est de Baudelaire,"* and looking quizzically from Natalie to the man at her side, *"Mes félicitations, monsieur,"* he ventured with a note of heartwrung renunciation.

And still they all swarmed about the woman. To each sailor she was at once the girl he left behind him, and the Notre Dame of lonely prayer. For hers was a loveliness obvious to every eye, hers an ethereality and colorfulness to stamp her the hinge of any such an

episode. Gaylor alone was immune to the transport of the moment, absorbed in his contemplation of the pink ear and delicately veined temple. To him alone Natalie was no enshrined unattainable, but a potential mistress winsome enough to—

A spasmodic quiver of her arm half recalled him to himself. He bent over her, astounded to note how ashen her face had become, how cold her hand, how grief-stricken her eyes. She was glancing about from one person to another as if in a very frenzy of search. He saw her look at Perriam, at Sarah, at the captain, at one of the sailors, and another, and another, averting her eyes each time as if in their homage there was something hostile, painful, terrorizing.

At last hesitantly, affrightedly, she looked up at him—looked into a face wherein there lay no hint of worship, but only an eager, playful questioning, in the steel blue eyes a half-awakened ardor, a proneness to possessorship. . . .

And on the instant her face lighted in response.

The bent head was lifted, the blood rushed to her cheeks, her eyes sparkled.

In delighted astonishment, he saw her lips curl into a smile so arch, so roguish, so inviting and full of promise that every other consideration dimmed before the vista it evoked—

"Mes félicitations, monsieur," the captain groaned.

"A bunch of nuts," cooed the besabled brunette.

He was left without a definite realization of the next few minutes' passing. Later he remembered that Perriam had trotted across the floor, stared full at him, and then at Natalie, snapped his jaws and turned away,—that Signor Roselli had broken into the Italian national anthem sung to the tune of the "Marseillaise," sung rackingly, ludicrously, spirit-blightingly but in a cracked baritone unmistakably reminiscent of Victor Maurel. Natalie's whispered "I want to go home," had been in the nature of an imperial edict. The crowd gave way before them, followed them with its eyes. It was only when once more they were seated in the automobile that he was able to regain his self-possession, and co-ordinate his thoughts.

Sarah Hodge sat in silence, patting her cavalier's hand.

Natalie, her face aglow, hummed *"La femme de feu."*

Presently Perriam proffered a preliminary hem, and lit a cigarette. "My two-year-old runs its maiden race at Hâvre de Grace on Monday. That means Baltimore for me for the week-end."

"Sorry, Stacey, I'll miss you." Natalie smiled into his eyes, and went on with her humming.

"Don't want you to get lonely. Don't want you to have a sunstroke working in those flower beds." Timidly, apologetically, he turned to Gaylor. "Perhaps Bayard will toddle about with you a bit while I'm gone?"

"Will Bayard?" Her soft, faint voice trilled into a laugh.

"Perhaps he'll be able to dine with you. I'd like him to see your place."

The blood mounted to Gaylor's forehead. This was something of a predicament. Curious, too, to notice the truckling admiration on his friend's face, the fawning obsequious manner. Decidedly, this situation was becoming intricate. Even as he groped about for an adequate excuse, he realized himself committed to this dinner *à deux*.

"Will you?" Perriam asked at last.

"Will you?" Natalie echoed.

VIII

HERE was no fit setting for Natalie Martineau. Gaylor fell into a sulky remonstrance as he drove his car through rows upon rows of stuccoed houses all with tiled roofs and diminutive lawns bordered by hedgerows, all as typical of life in the upper suburban bourgeoisie as were the perambulators, and tricycles, and raucous-voiced young humans that strewed the streets. No fit setting for Natalie. . . . But his eyes

brightened when they lit upon a high stone wall at a short distance, over which the branches of a lofty elm hung invitingly, over which he caught a glimpse of a brick chimney and a curl of smoke mounting skywards, as if hailing him, as if welcoming.

Without giving a thought to location and street number, he recognized this for his destination, brought the machine to a halt, and hurried through an iron gateway that creaked a greeting as he passed into a garden.

There were gravel paths. There were beds of flowers. There was a lily pool. And a lawn, shaded by the elm tree and planted with variegated firs, seemed at once to plead for a vista of farstretching woodlands, and to be content that an ivy-grown wall should make of it a little haven in an unsympathetic world, accessible only to a chosen few. The little welcoming curl of smoke merged with some cloudlets in a gray blue sky wherein he caught the first glimmer of the evening star. The outer world was shut out, became immeasurably remote, and he began to feel a little sorry for that outer world, cordial and condescending toward it.

When he was ushered into the house, again he experienced, and even more intensely, that strange sense of welcome. The room in which he awaited Natalie was lighted by oil lamps under softly tinted shades, and hung in chintz of a solemn, tranquil indigo besprinkled with a quaint conceit of bluebells. A big black cat curled on the hearthrug rose when he entered, yawned, arched its back, regarded him judiciously for a moment, and then, as if he passed muster, curled up again, and closed its eyes. Gradually he became aware of a delicate aroma—was it lavender? Was it rosemary?—so faint as to seem only part of the atmosphere, and of a sound, soothing, indistinct, just audible, which explained itself when he discovered a wicker cage wherein a pair of lovebirds nestled against one another, nodding their tiny green heads, humming, chirruping, cooing.

There was only one discordant note. Over the mantel hung a painting and he recognized, in all the ignominy of fleshliness, heavy of jowl, florid of face, the likeness of Harvey Martineau. And yet so all-permeant was the sensation of serenity, of home, as to render nugatory the portrait's effect. Moreover, whereas a long contemplation might have fostered misgivings, his interest died out at the sound of Natalie's trilling laughter from the staircase.

Her glad greeting became a shaky laugh before the look in his eyes. For the sight of her reduced him to an awestruck silence. Here was another Natalie from the one he had come to know. Tonight no trace of a shadow lay upon her face, tonight there was a new radiance about her. Black velvet, lace, pearls, glistening skin and lambent eyes,—all the same, but with a difference. For to-night she seemed utterly irresponsible, thistledowny, and free for the first time from that strain he had noticed tightening her lips amidst the frolics of midnight revues and dancing parties.

At last she looked up at him timidly, adoringly. And when their hands met, a crimson flood mounted to his forehead at that quiver in her finger-tips which he, who had caused many hearts to flutter, could not but recognize as the infallible token of a woman's readiness for surrender. The black cat uncurled itself again, yawned, arched its back, regarded them with a half sad, half jocose air, and stalked away like a discreet duenna overawed by her task, and beating a retreat on tiptoe. Again Natalie laughed shakily, and her laughter was attune with a certain promise which charged the atmosphere, with the crooning of the love-birds, with the glow of the lamplight, and the vague scent, whether of lavender or rosemary, in the air.

It was a long time before she spoke, —words which caused Gaylor a surge of gladness in that they put a seal of inevitability upon hazy hopes and unformulated hankering.

"Don Quixote and Sancho Panza have gone to the races," she warbled,

"and they won't be back for two days!"

It was the culminant touch, this mention of Perriam. For Gaylor felt no inclination to accuse himself of perfidy toward his friend, even now when his friend's mistress looked up at him with unmasked invitation in her amber eyes.

Here he felt himself set apart from a humdrum and time-weary world with its scruples and its qualms. Here was holiday existence. Here was enchantment of the senses and something more. Here, was a little siren who suggested the tradition, the legend, troubadours' songs, and harps stilled for centuries. It was as if the attributes of all fair women of all the ages, as if every eye that had flashed its fervour, every lip that had curled its delight at a whispered wooing, every white throat and marbly arm were epitomized here, reduced to a lovable minuteness, as if tenderness itself were made incarnate, and tinged, too, with an incorporeality and naive wisdom such as painters of long ago put into the faces of their blithe-eyed angels. There was melody about the woman, and lustre, and fragrance.

And so the two talked a little, laughed a little, ate, presently, but very little and over the gleaming napery looked at one another in a sort of happy bewilderment. Perhaps it was because of the surrender in her great eyes, perhaps because of the still serenity, the sensation of home, that he who had determined to take her lightly, realized all at once how precious she was to him. The holiday mood departed. He began to rebel at the thought that all this must be transitory. And he noticed that her lips drooped, scarce noticeably then. The faintest hint of a shadow crossed her face.

After they had left the table, even as she stood close to him, even as she appeared to flutter closer, before his diffidence she wavered and moved uneasily away, pacing the floor for some moments, seating herself at length at the piano. She ran her fingers over the keys, and began to sing in her light soprano, an old Schwabian folk-song:

"Für die Zeit wo du g'liebst mi hast
Da dank' i dir schön
Und i wünsch dass dir's anders wo
Besser mag geh'n."

Gaylor was not averse to prolonging the preliminaries. He sat at a little distance looking, through lowered lids, at the child-like profile. The cat had reappeared, and as if wishing to assure him of its commendation, jumped to his knee, its purrs furnishing, with the croon of the love-birds, an obbligato to the music.

Natalie played snatches from many songs, blending one with the other into a pretty potpourri,—"The Lass with the Delicate Air," "Annchen von Tharau," Schubert's "The Lime Tree."

After a time, Gaylor tumbled the cat from his lap, and walked over to an open window. A light breeze brought the fragrance of spring flowers into the room. In the sky a pale crescent shone among the stars. Once or twice she glanced up at him, and then quickly away, drifting into a street ditty, or into one of Ronsard's forgotten lyrics replete with *"aubes"* and *"crépuscles,"* and an ever-recurring *"éternité,"* which seemed to echo all the light-hearted vows of all the light-hearted lovers who have sworn constancy "forever, until tomorrow." At last, espying through the window, the pale crescent, she ended with a Neapolitan song to the new moon,

"Luna d'argento fallo sognar,
Bacialo in fronte non lo destar."

The cat purred on, the love-birds cooed. Through the open window again there stole a little breeze laden with an aromatic springtime freshness. Very quietly she came to his side then, slipt her hand in his, and again he felt that unmistakable tremor at the fingertips. But still she averted her head, still she appeared strangely uneasy. And when he cupped the little chin with his hand, and forced her to look at him, the eyes still wavered, darted about the room in alarm, fixed themselves finally on some-

thing behind him, over his shoulder. . . . And he saw all the trouble in her face melt into a look of tender compassion. . . . A jealous anger swept over him when the limpness of her hand told him that she was deep in an abstraction wherein he had no part. He wheeled—and saw that she was looking at the portrait of Harvey Martineau, looking, with that expression of undying affection, into the smug countenance of the departed terpsichorean.

Full of commingled misery and disgust that just at an auspicious moment, this mountebank should intervene, even from the grave, he backed away. She sighed, pouted with a touch of bravado, assumed a surface flippancy to cover the inner disquietude.

"Poor Harvey wanted to recreate the Hellenic spirit. He had a mission in life. And missions, you know, goad a woman to murder or matrimony. Mine was the subtler vengeance."

And yet, desperately though she tried with a half-hearted toss of the head and shrug of the shoulders, to adopt a superficial cynicism, to direct the course of events from channels becoming constantly deeper, to the shallows she joyed in, the attempt failed. For, though he sought to stifle the abhorence her relations with men such as Perriam and Martineau provoked, he saw her eyelids narrow and lips tighten at what she seemed to consider an injustice done to the man whose likeness looked down upon them. And there was so much pain mingled with the anger on her face that, in spite of himself, his contempt faded before the ingenuous witchery of the woman.

All he could realize was that she was indispensable to him, that there must be some exoneration, some vindication for all this tawdriness that enmeshed her, that he must concentrate his every faculty in one grand appeal for her to explain Perriam and Martineau, and clear away all the sordid, insidious elements that lurked between them. But his grand appeal became no more than a senseless wave of the arm. He could only mutter a husky "Why, Natalie,—why?" and stand before her with a hangdog air, keenly aware that he felt miserable and looked silly.

But presently the head that had been held angrily aloft resumed its dispirited droop. For an instant her fingers intertwined themselves with his. The caress struck him as being oddly impersonal, inspired by an acute sensibility to the dejectedness of his attitude which compelled her, averse though she was to dwelling on the topic, to comfort, to reassure, and thereby to fulfill a sacred obligation.

She turned away, walked the length of the room, and back to his side. It occurred to him, as he watched her, that there had been some bungling by the high gods in the fashioning of her. She seemed to have been wrought for the sheer delectation of mankind in its heydey moments, but too exquisitely wrought, with too absolute a perfection of detail so that rather than a buoyant gladness, her loveliness engendered a reverential wonder that irked and repelled. . . .

Back at his side, an exaltation swept over her. She looked like a little sibyl who had great influence with the gods—and mistrusted that influence; like a little saint with unlimited powers of intercession, and a dread of these powers. She was silent as if in apprehension of a portentous revelation she was about to make. In a hurried whisper finally she spoke:

"When Harvey was deeply moved, he snivelled. . . . Stupendously stirring, that snivel!"

A clench of the hands, a catch of the breath, and she went on:

"Essentially vulgar, of course, poor Harvey—and yet . . . and yet—"

Her voice mounted from the whisper, became resonant and clear.

"I told you how the aunties went in for discoveries. They used to give soirées and teas and things. He was quite the lion in their set. He came here once, only once, mind you—that was the terrifying part of it . . . only once, and for an hour! Seemed a bit taken by me. The aunties were over-

joyed, but he went away of course, without a declaration. There were more important matters—a dowager duchess, I believe, and a rich widow . . . you know the sort of thing that comes in the way of a footlight idol. A year later he returned to make amends. A year later I came down into this room, and there—"

High above her head she raised her arm, bringing it down with an impassioned sweep to indicate a position near the mantel, while her eyes distended as if that spot on the hearthrug had been indelibly imprinted in her memory for all time.

"There stood a fat man snivelling at me.

"Returned to make amends," she repeated. "Wanted so pitifully to make amends. Of course it didn't occur to him that his ardor might not be returned. . . . And the svelte Adonis came back a mountain of flesh. Lovesickness had made him neglect his exercises and diet. He came back an Apollo inflated by his own magnificence into an object of ridicule. But still magnificent, I tell you. Oh, quite, quite magnificent in his consummate self-esteem.

"Oh, Bayard!" All supplication, she looked up into his eyes. "Try to imagine him standing almost where you're standing, looking so silly and conceited, so astonishingly fat, and yet so utterly vanquished. Try to see the touching helplessness of the man. . . . From a clear sky to have it dawn on me that I had created this havoc—that I, who had seen him only once, was responsible! Did it make any difference that he was cheap and common? He proposed. He said, 'You will be ample compensation for all I lose,' said it with such sublime assurance that I was alive to the compliment paid me. And when I didn't answer, all the self-possession faded away. 'You are necessary to me,' he bleated,—whined it, whimpered it, snivelled. And I had done this—out of a clear sky—to realize—for the first time to feel that hideous sense of responsibility! Did it make any difference that he was a tawdry mummer?"

She brushed her hand across her brow, appeared gradually to collect herself, and went on in an expressionless monotone. "So we were married. He began to fast, and to practise new dances. He would get purple, and puff awfully. It really made him very ill. I had to assist, barefoot, you know,—do the Ariadne to his Dionysos, the Euridice to his Orpheus. There were the nastiest pebbles, and ants crawled over one's toes. And he went on fasting, and grew thinner and thinner, sillier and sillier, sicker and sicker, happier and happier,—happy because he had permitted me to make him happy, and so of course, bestowed untold happiness on me. . . . At last,"—again her voice fell to a tired whisper,—"At last, by the grace of the gods, he died,—died conscious to the end of having done me the one supreme honor. And it was an honor, I tell you. . . . Well, the ants crawled over my toes no longer. That's all."

Gaylor was profoundly moved. His senses were in a turmoil, that soothed even as it disquieted him. All this was madness, and yet soul-satisfyingly as it should be. For during her recital, while the figure of Martineau grew more and more vivid, so, proportionately it became shadowy, became no more than a marionette emblematic of mankind in its sorrier aspects of that element of grim burlesque which strives perpetually and without avail to make tragedy an unbeautiful thing. And now Natalie seemed frailer, more wistful and winsome than ever.

He took her hand,—again that quiver at the fingertips—he put an arm about her, and she buried her face in his coat-sleeve, remained without a word for a full minute, until at last, as if it were incumbent upon her completely to still his doubts, once and for all to unburden herself, she began to speak, her face still buried, her confused murmur just reaching him:

"Can't bear the fox trot. Hate the screechy jazz bands. Baseball bores me. Don't like the revues, don't know a thing about horse races and prize

fights. . . . Memorize the jargon from the sporting sheets. Memorize stock quotations, too. Stocks frighten me to death. . . . Harvey left me a decent fortune—the aunties, too. But Stacey must handle it for me, must play the protector . . . wants to make me a fortune—never will. Beth Steel, Electric Boat, Mercantile Marine—hate the words,—and when the war broke out they slumped, when that ship was sunk—oh, Bayard, the worry of it! But Stacey must play the protector for his soul's joy."

A sigh merged into a laugh. With her head still cuddled against his coat-sleeve, she raised her eyes.

"At first I had a *faible* for Stacey. He's enigmatic and appealing. I liked him awfully. And then, Bayard, it all happened over again! Not a snivel nor a whimper this time, but the touching helplessness of the man, the feeling of having created a havoc, that dreadful sense of responsibility! 'You're a fetching baggage,' he'd snap out, with a perfunctory pat, and then his voice would get all husky, and his eyes cloudy, and he'd add—he says it so often, 'you've heard him perhaps, or haven't you?—he'd add. 'You induce a spiritual genuflexion.' It's irresistible, its terrible, when a man gets that way, all humble and worshipful before you. It sort of constitutes a sacred obligation." Her eyes avoided his, but the lips curled. "So I became Sancho Panza's sweetie and the lady of Don Quixote's dreams. Marriage doesn't fit in with Stacey's mode of existence. It's too—too concrete, shall I say? But he made it very clear that I was the one woman of his life."

Once again her voice dwindled to a whisper, "I hate jazz bands."

He held her closer, strove for words, but found himself unable to speak, unable to return her gaze, so occupied had he become with an attempt to formulate a feeble, intangible conviction in the recesses of his brain that an enlightenment, forthcoming, was about to effect a reapproachment between widely disparate emotions, and issues hanging in an oscillant balance. One conclusion assumed definite outlines: it had been infinitely fitting that he should have seen her first during that encounter with a masher, and that the tower top of the Woolworth Building, should have provoked her "quite too terribly ill at ease on Zion." . . .

Meanwhile she stood immobile, nonplussed, fearful of an unfavorable judgment, until at last, when minute followed minute, she fell away from him with a sob.

"Why do they try always to hoist me up on a pedestal? I dearly love a light affair. A few days, a few kisses, and godspeed before the thing begins to pall! Why the vows and the mine-forevers? . . . When they stand before you, all panicky and helpless, you can't resist, can you? Ah, Bayard, can't you see that it's been just—just plain hell? And yet"—a little hand caught at his coat-sleeve—"Men!" She cried out, all tremulous and radiant, "There's something breath-be-reavingly beautiful about them, and it frightens me so!"

X

A LONG stillness followed, so absolute that it seemed to the man to be full of sound wherein the echo of Natalie's treble vibrated in unison with another voice that acclaimed this the moment of revelation. Through the confusion, something familiar,—was it something he had heard or read?—stirred in the recesses of his consciousness. . . . A morality which was all sympathy, which had no concern with untempered good or untempered evil, which could not condemn, knew nothing of scorn or disgust, knew only pity, and admiration, and wonder. Beings made through no volition of their own the depositaries of great powers over the lives of men, who shrank from the intolerable honour, and whose faces were saddened—had he read somewhere of this, heard of it, or was he only listening to a voice in the silence?—"saddened perpetually by the shadow upon

them of the great things from which they shrink."

All at once, with the staggering abruptness of an unexpected bugle blare, came the revelation. All at once he saw the *vraie verité,* saw into the spirit of this woman who stood waiting his verdict. He saw a little being at home only in dells and compelled unceasingly to look into depths that frightened, dragged unceasingly up into heights that repelled. He saw a creature ill attuned with the graver issues of existence, and forced unceasingly to face them. And there was an investiture of dignity, of irresistible poignancy even, to the very meanness of her associates, to the very fact that her heights were arid spots where ants crawled over a counterfeit Ariadne's pebble-torn toes, and the strains of Olympian lyres became a jazz band's fox trots—to this vanquishment of a dionysian blitheness by a pair of miming, cavorting buffoons, to the lamentable burlesque of the whole thing. For he thought to discern a symbolic significance in this leaning toward the warped and the tawdry. Natalie's hands outstretched to Perriam and Martineau, Natalie's head drooped before them bespoke a sympathetic aliveness to that shabby side of every man incomprehensible to himself, and overspread with a hallowing tinge of beauty, all those pettinesses, farcical, abject, degrading that poison the still moment of introspection.

A butterfly with a sense of responsibility, a little celestial being the brush of whose wings was all the more potent to assuage because these wings hung so burdensomely from her shoulders, her insouciance and lighthearted tenderness in itself evoked a homage that constituted a preëminent obligation. And Gaylor thought to divine the fallacies of a philosophy of froth and feathers, of bubbles and thistledown.

All Natalie asked was to play at life and love, to be the plaything of those who play at life and love. But her qualifications for the part had been too lavishly meted out. Her allure evoked a degree of delight that arrested too forcibly, smacked of the solemn transport, became at one with that elemental festive ecstasy which religion excites, and war, and impassioned love.

Gaylor remembered having been stirred in much the same fashion that Natalie stirred him, once amidst the clash of arms when he led his revolutionists to victory, once at high mass in a tumbledown church in South America, with incense in the air, and choir boys singing, and the noonday sunlight filtering through stained glass windows. . . .

All at once her whole recital became simply an imperative mandate not to fail her. He determined that no mooning declarations and mawkish sentiments would answer the frank invitation launched from her eyes. For she had read his favorable verdict. Her lips curled. A soft flush tinted the white cheeks. All poised with outstretched arms ready to run to him, "Don Quixote and Sancho Pauza have gone to the races," came her glad carol. "And they won't be back for two days! And I have a *faible* for you, Bayard Gaylor, dear."

Scarce were the words spoken when she was at his side, and stood on tiptoe the more readily to entwine her little arms around his neck. Lute-like laughter rang out; soft, full lips crushed against his. He caught her in an embrace which lifted her from her feet, tousled the luminous hair, and while she clung to him the breeze wafted them a dewy fragrance, raised a silky strand until it just grazed his cheek in a caress so light and fleeting as almost to be indistinguishable from the kiss, —a mere, evanescent brush of the lips that lulled the first ardent outbreak into a languorous interlude.

She perched on the arm of a chintz-covered chair, drawing him beside her, snuggling her head at his shoulder. Little, inarticulate murmurs passed between them, until after floundering about in search of an exquisitely phrased compliment, he succeeded in

voicing a matter-of-fact, "Nice skin, yours, Natalie."

"Do you really think so?" His prosaic statement left her overjoyed.

"And nice hair."

"Oh, truly, do you think so?"

"Neat wrists and ankles, too."

"It's quite altogether soul-satisfying to have you find them so, dear."

And at last she curled from the arm of the chair to his knee, laid a warm cheek against his. For all an air of poise and modernity about the two, this woman with her starry eyes and translucent skin, and the man, handsome, eager-eyed, with his gray hair fitting like a steel helmet over his boyish face, might have been figures in an old-world romance.

As if sensing some such idea, Natalie whispered:

"The Chevalier Bayard,—he was a knight without fear and without reproach, wasn't he? Do you know, there's something long-ago-ey about you? You'd have looked quite altogether stunning togged up in a coat of mail. I think you'd have fallen in love with some cunning little nun, and said 'get thee behind me' only when first you saw her poor, shorn pate. And then you'd have become an anchorite in penitence, and chanted *misereres* to a midnight moon. And you'd have strolled in the desert with a book of dreary thou-shalt-nots, and the Queen of Sheba would have appeared to tempt you. And then you'd have said 'Get thee behind me' to the dreary thou-shalt-nots, wouldn't you, dear? And—"

"Tomorrow, darling,—" pertinent in no wise to her pretty prattle, a brilliant idea moved him to interrupt,— "Tomorrow we'll ride out to Rémy's."

"To Rémy's," she echoed. "Of course. An *al fresco* phase is essential to every amour, and the ride will furnish that. But why think about tomorrow? Tomorrow is part of an ever so distant future."

Again the brush of her lips across his. And again, despite a grim resolution, he felt strangely averse to the ephemerality of this episode. That little lady of the battlemented tower—Why not, after all, an enduring association? Here lay too subtle a spiritual appeal commingled with enchantment of the senses to— Her troubled eyes checked him.

"Thinking about, Natalie?"

"Merely wondering whether your intentions are honorable or matrimonial."

And reassured by his light laugh, she flung her little arms about him, crushed the crimson lips against his. The cat had been asleep on the hearthrug. Now it rose, yawned, arched its back, stared at them commendatorily, and stalked out of the room. The love-birds were at roost, their heads pillowed one on the other. And spring-scented breezes stole over these two, flicking the flames in the oil lamps, playfully fondling Natalie's golden brown hair.

XI

GAYLOR ran into town the next morning to adjust some neglected correspondence, and especially to rid his mind of a disquieting notion that there might be news from Washington.

He drove at high speed to his rooms, grudging every moment that kept him from Natalie, violating traffic regulations with a contemptuous disregard for city ordinances and their uniformed minions. He drove beneath a sparkle of spring sunshine which seemed to proclaim him the hero of a romance in its first bloom, to beam its felicitations, to become part of an epithalamium in the air.

And with each passing minute he grew more eager to return to the woman he had left a half-hour since, standing among her flower-beds, her eyes starrier than ever, while over the two there hovered that glad confusion which betrays beings still in the first rosy haze of a newly-awakened ardor.

They were at that period when lovers are oblivious not only to the ugliness of the world, but to everything profound, or prosaic, or sad, or stressful as well, when existence is all thistledown and colorful glamour, and vehe-

ment declarations give way to light talk of inconsequential things. So he drove even faster, for there were fugitive memories that must be communicated to Natalie. Ambitions long since discarded sprang into life again. He must tell her—exactly what did not matter—perhaps secrets of the diplomatic service, perhaps gossip of high court circles, and all for the delight of being stirred to an *au delà* by watching the play of her features as she listened, eyes twinkling, widening, narrowing, lids wavering, the color deepening and ebbing in her cheeks, the quick smiles quivering and disappearing.

He was loath to waste this hour of the halcyon holiday. All the world seemed in festive array in his honor. He dashed through streets adorned by scores of flags, and even they lost any significance which attached them to a land, a race, a creed, and became emblems of something carefree, joyous, daring, became no more than bright-colored banners streaming in the breeze with a dainty abandon that reminded him oddly of the way Natalie flung impetuous little arms about him, and laughed when she kissed him.

When he arrived at his hotel, he was out of the automobile almost before it had come to a halt, mounted the staircase two steps at a time in scorn of the lift, burst into his room . . . and stopped short, prey to a sudden shock, a blur of the senses, an unmistakable thud and ominous foreboding. A telegram lay on his desk.

He held it a full minute before opening it. It had an official look. Not for an instant did it strike him that it might contain anything other than disastrous news. The shock at sight of it, and subsequent blur had been too arresting. His one conviction was that the idyl was over—and too bad, for it was a fine day for a spin to Rémy's. . . .

At last he tore open the envelope, and without surprise, without disappointment, read the communication.

An imperative summons from his chief in Washington. Important official business. Leave on the one ten train. It was now quarter of eleven. . . . The idyl was over. Too bad. A fine day for a spin to Rémy's—

There was no time for regret and remonstrance.

At once, and methodically, he went about his preparations for departure, rang for his valet, telephoned for the chauffeur. It would take fifteen minutes to get his belongings together, three quarters of an hour to reach Natalie's home. That would leave him some twenty minutes, wherein to make his farewells. The idyl was over. Too bad. A fine day for a spin to Rémy's. This confounded summons meant no leisure for months to come of course. There would be a week in Washington, then a training camp, then the sailing. . . . Devilishly unfair, the whole proceedings. All they had asked, Natalie and he, was two days. Couldn't the gods have stretched a point and granted them that? The idyl was over— And at the recurring thought, suddenly he became rebellious. Why, after all, was it over? Why couldn't it be made enduring? He was no Perriam, no Martineau. Why then must it be a temporary liaison?

The valet stood at the door with his valise. He descended to the street, gave the chauffeur his directions, and a curt "Make it quick," and yielded himself to a mood of protestant brooding as they tore past city thoroughfares into quieter roads, and finally up to the iron gate that again creaked its welcome as unheedingly he strode through.

He was in a humor for self pity. There would be a certain satisfaction in seeing the pleasure fade out of Natalie's face at his news. But when she herself came to the door, the words at his lips were silenced. For it was a very white-faced Natalie who confronted him, a Natalie without a smile or a greeting. Moreover, with the smell of cigarettes, the suggestion of another's recent presence hovered in the room. He turned to her inquiringly.

"Stacey has just been here," she faltered. "He didn't go to the races. He never intended to go."

"Well, and what of it? Perriam be damned!"

Gaylor spoke so roughly as to astound himself. For following hard upon the unfortunate turn of fate that peremptorily put an end to this affair, her colorless cheeks and unexpected announcement served to put him in the light of a sneaking pilferer of another's goods, and reduce the whole episode to a basis sordid, ill-bred, and essentially vulgar. There, too, it was ten minutes of twelve, and the clock on the mantel ticked away relentlessly. Why the pallor? Was it shame? Was it compassion? Only ten minutes left, and now Perriam again.

But she failed to notice his harshness. And when, irritated almost beyond control, he turned to her, he saw that it must have been excessive joy which left her so pale, for her eyes were upraised, and she was smiling.

"He never intended to go at all," she repeated, "and, oh, Bayard, I shan't have to foxtrot any more!"

"*There,—*" As on the previous evening she raised her arm high above her head and brought it down with a grand sweep to indicate a spot on the hearthrug,—"He stood exactly there when he told me. Oh, Bayard, it was all so funny, and so sad, and so beautiful!"

She lingered lazily over her words, abask in a sense of deliverance. "You see, dear, he adores you, and it's quite the proper thing that he should want to give me up to you. For Sancho Panza really would better have some one with a more spontaneous aptitude for the post he offers, and it's rather in the line of a Don Quixote to venerate from a distance. So Sancho Panza fired me for gross incompetence. Did it politely though,- sort of appointed me a sweetie *emeritus* honorably discharged from active service. And Don Quixote will delight in vaporizing his inamorata into a divine unattainable. . . . Dear Stacey,—he's really overjoyed by the turn of events. I believe he'd like us to marry. I believe he hinted at it. I believe he longs to officiate as best man at the altar, and be godfather to a little Stacey Gaylor!" All aglow, she sped across the room into his arms. "And now let's be off to Rémy's! And—"

"I leave for Washington on the one ten train."

He felt the little body straighten, stiffen."

"What's that?" Her voice was shrill. "What's that you say, Bayard?"

"For Washington on the one ten. There was a telegram—"

"For Washington?"

"For Washington."

"And on the one ten?"

He nodded.

"Will you be back tomorrow?"

He shook his head.

"This week then?"

"Probably not for months, Natalie."

"Oh!" She turned away, walked across the room rearranged a book on the table, a cushion on the couch, placed the birdcage in a position where it caught the sunlight, and paused in the midst of the proceedings to look at the clock:

"The one ten— But it's noon now, and it takes an hour—"

"I know. There's only a moment to spare."

"Oh! You'd better hurry then." Her eyes dropped to the floor. She returned to his side, and laid a hand in his. All his resolutions to make his adieux in casual fashion faded when once again he felt the quiver at her fingertips. He slipt an arm about, brought her close, until her head rested on his shoulder.

"It's been very lovely. Unforgettable and—and altogether lovely. I'll think of you often. And now good-bye, little Natalie."

"Good-bye, Bayard, and all good fortune." She lifted her hands to his shoulders, her lips to his. "Isn't it odd the way things get all bungled up? I did want it to last a little longer. I— Oh!"

It was not so much his sudden grip of her wrists that brought the frightened exclamation, as the instantaneous change of her expression from a simple

disheartenment to an appalled blankness that provoked the clutch at her wrists, the fierce straining of her to him, the revolt of his every energy, his every faculty against her averted eyes and resisting arms. The little clock on the mantel rang out the noon hour.

"I must go now."

But he held her even closer as he spoke, acutely aware that this was a momentous turning-point wherein their wills and welfare were mere insignificant factors, they themselves mere puppets in the hands of a power neither kindly nor unkindly disposed, indifferent, amused and about to issue an ineluctable decree.

With a quick wrench she freed herself, backed away. Her eyes were fixed in a sort of frantic steadfastness on the hearthrug as if again this spot where Martineau had once stood, an hour since Perriam, and now he, were stamping itself ineffaceably in her consciousness.

"I must go now," he repeated, and attempted a step toward the doorway, but to no avail. For an onrush of chaotic motives, resolutions, hankerings, held him rooted to the spot. Above all else he was yielding to an instinct for possessorship. He wanted this woman, wanted to acclaim her his before the world, wanted to hold her for all time by all the commonplace bonds and standards acknowledged by a commonplace world. It was rather cruel, of course, and yet the cruelty was not his, but rather that power's who, in hearty amusement, was issuing an edict. . . .

"Must go now—"

He felt a sense of instability, a swimming in his head.

His vision of her became only a luminous blur. She seemed to drift farther and farther away, to immaterialize before his eyes. . . . Rather cruel, of course, but could he help this awe before her, and hungriness? The gods, in a spirit of gentle irony, had fashioned too perfect a thing. A little high-hearted creature, a glad abandon, the gleam of fair flesh, a kiss, a laugh, godspeed and rosemary . . . but could he help it that now again she should be condemned to meet with lowered eyes the worship on a man's face, to hear with unwilling ears the still *Aves* and *Magnificats* in the air?

There was a moisture in his eyes, a catch at his throat. The figure at the further end of the room assumed even hazier outlines. She was standing with her back to him. Through the whirl of his senses dimly he apprehended that of all incredible things, she was humming a song. The words just reached him:

"When a fellow's pal steals a fellow's gal,
Then there's trouble, trouble, trouble in the air."

Poor taste, that. And yet he could not but realize that she was singing the silly song in an anguish of endeavor to free the air of its obscurities and transports. She was resisting not him, but a relentless fate, the spell of the moment, a power that laughed at her poor little struggle. With apparent relish she dwelt on the street argot, swayed at the hips, shrugged her shoulders, made a sorry attempt at a roll of the eyes, and an audacious smile, struggled with every note, struggled desperately, flounderingly, until the light soprano lost its buoyancy, dwindled almost to inaudibility, died out at last in a faint falsetto, a half-sob.

Very slowly then she raised her head, and as if all her hopes were concentrated upon some reassurance she might find, lifted her eyes—lifted them to a bowed head, a white face, troubled eyes, and a hurt, bewildered look,—boyish, fervid, pleading, and miserable. . . .

Hazily through the blur he saw her head droop, and the little hands flutter out to him.

"Must go."

While he sensed in her strange aliveness to another's need of her a rare loveliness that imbued her destiny with the anomalous attribute of a roseate doom, it was too pitiable to see her thus,

helpless before the helplessness of a man. He made for the door for the hallway. But hradly was his hand on the knob when she was beside him in his arms.

No shadow beneath the eyes, no high-sounding words nor sacrificial air. But only the tinkle of her laughter, the brush of her lips, a flushed cheek laid against his,—soft, incoherent murmurings: "Join you in Washington in a day or two. . . . Marriage, you know. . . . Co-lossally, soul-stirringly good fun . . . quite altogether stu-pen—"

A SONG OF LONELINESS

By Eunice Tietjens

THE silver night is faint with beauty,
The iris shimmer in the moon,
Soft as the words of love remembered
The night winds croon.

No tremor shakes the moon in heaven,
The gleaming iris feel no smart
And nothing aches in all this beauty
Except my heart.

THE first time a woman cries it is a catastrophe. The second time it is a calamity. The third time it is unfortunate. And after that it is simply a nuisance.

THE greatest and most faithful lovers in the world were women. The cleverest and most faithless lovers in the world were ladies.

I AM no longer a misogynist. I have found a pretty girl who sits upon my lap without wiping her shoes on my trousers.

HOW THE GODS AVENGED MEOUL KI NING

By Lord Dunsany

MEOUL KI NING was on his way with a lily from the lotus ponds of Esh to offer it to the Goddess of Abundance in her temple Aoul Keroon. And on the road from the pond to the little hill and the temple Aoul Keroon, Ap Ariph, his enemy, shot him with an arrow from a bow that he had made out of bamboo, and took his pretty lily up the hill, and offered it to the Goddess of Abundance in her temple Aoul Keroon. And the goddess was pleased with the gift, as all women are, and sent pleasant dreams to Ap Ariph for seven nights straight from the moon.

And on the seventh night the gods held conclave together; on the cloudy peak they held it, above Narn, Ktoon and Pti. So high their peak rises that no man heard their voices. They spake on that cloudy mountain (not the highest hamlet heard them), "What doth the Goddess of Abundance" (but naming her Lling, as they name her), "what doth she sending sweet dreams for seven nights to Ap Ariph?"

And the gods sent for their seer, who is all eyes and feet, running to and fro on the Earth, observing the ways of men, seeing even their littlest doings, never deeming a doing too little, but knowing the web of the gods is woven of littlest things. He it is that sees the cat in the garden of parrakeets, the thief in the upper chamber, the sin of the child with the honey, the women talking indoors and the small huts' innermost things. Standing before the gods, he told them the case of Ap Ariph and the wrongs of Meoul Ki Ning and the rape of the lotus lily; he told of the cutting and making of Ap Ariph's bamboo bow, of the shooting of Meoul Ki Ning and of how the arrow hit him, and the smile on the face of Lling when she came by the lotus bloom.

And the gods were wroth with Ap Ariph and swore to avenge Ki Ning.

And the ancient one of the gods, he that is older than Earth, called up the thunder at once, and raised his arms and cried out on the gods' high windy mountain, and prophesied on those rocks with runes that were older than speech, and sang in his wrath old songs that he learned in storms from the sea when only that peak of the gods in the whole of the earth was dry; and he swore that Ap Ariph should die that night, and the thunder raged about him, and the tears of Lling were vain.

The lightning stroke of the gods leaping earthward, seeking Ap Ariph, passed near to his house but missed him. A certain vagabond was down from the hills, singing songs in the street nearby the house of Ap Ariph, songs of a former folk that dwelt once, they say, in those valleys, and begging for rice and curds; it was him the lightning hit.

And the gods were satisfied and their wrath abated, and their thunder rolled away and the great black clouds dissolved, and the ancient one of the gods went back to his age-old sleep, and light came, and the birds, and morning shone on the mountain, and the peak stood clear to see, the serene home of the gods.

THE STOLEN APPLES SYSTEM

By Achmed Abdullah

I

THE name of the Economic Problem was Miss Priscilla Rutherfurd Van Twilliger, and Nature besides having given her her name—which was a very swagger one unless you happen to belong to the intolerant Brahmins who look back across the bridge of three hundred years or so and object, even at that roseate distance, to dissenting Liverpool tradesmen called Pilgrims and to merchants in Edam cheese and raw Genever spirits called Knickerbockers—had endowed her with a sum total of bully decorative material which made her look like a magazine cover with brains.

For she had an aureole of russet hair that piled up, carved and statuesque, like a Florentine helmet of the best Renaissance period; the sort of wide, generous mouth, coral rather than crimson, that seems to hide what it promises to give—some time; deep, bluish-black eyes speaking from underneath hooded brows of probable passion without the tiring confidence of passion too intimately satisfied; and a body that had neither the rustic outlines of the Macedonian peasant wench known as the Venus de Milo nor the ingrown curves, the Aubrey-Beardsleyan angles, and exaggerated dimples decreed by latter-day fashion and Mrs. Vernon Castle. She had achieved the physical impossibility of being both slim and plump, and the sartorial impossibility of being exceedingly well dressed without looking *cocotte;* and she could wear short skirts without making you think of Louis Quinze furniture.

She was what is known in the vulgate as a Peach.

But not the cling-stone variety.

For Nature had also given her a hatful of ideals. Ideals about love, about marriage, about men and women and what makes men and women tick, and it was there—in her role of analytical and, therefore, pessimistic idealist—that she had developed into an Economic Problem: from the point of view of her parents, Mr. Adrian Cuyper Van Twilliger, and Mrs. Julia Van Twilliger, née Rutherfurd.

They were rich. But not very rich. Say: thirty thousand dollars a year without work and without worry, a little red brick and white woodwork house on Eleventh Street, a few doors from Fifth Avenue, a place in Westchester County at exactly the correct distance between Suburbia and Yokeldom, four servants, including a French—not an English—butler, an electric landaulette without a nickel clamp to hold paper orchids, and a three thousand dollar automobile that usually lasted into the third season.

Of course, they had hereditary membership in the circles, clubs, cycles, cliques, coteries, conclaves, and camarillas of the Very Select. So hereditary, in fact, that Mrs. Van Twilliger had never seen the necessity of going to Europe and being presented at that Clearing House of the Socially Not So Damned Sure, known as the Court of Saint James, while her husband was a member of Tammany Hall, had a friend called Brian Korrigan, ate prunes, and used the Mid-Victorian toothpick—all without the slightest loss of caste.

He was so sure of himself socially that he even refused to run up trade bills, and in this he was supported by his wife who was an Old Dear: a little on the autumn side of fifty, of an attractively matronly bulk, rosy-skinned, small-footed, and with a mass of lovely, soft, snow-white hair which she

powdered every morning of her life.

"Adrian dear," said Mrs. Van Twilliger one morning, in her rose-and-silver boudoir—she belonged to just that generation—looking up from her household account book.

"Yes, my love?" Adrian Van Twilliger smiled affectionately at his wife.

"I wish to consult you on a matter of domestic importance." Thirty-five years earlier she had visited the Misses Hodkins' School for the Daughters of Gentlemen, and was very exact in her speech. "I have taken the trouble of dissecting our annual expenditure into its elemental components."

At once he grew slightly nervous.

Since the day of their marriage he had left all business matters in the capable hands of his wife. It had always seemed so simple: thirty thousand dollars a year paid by the family trust in quarterly sums, the rest a mere detail of writing cheques and making correct additions and subtractions.

She turned a little in her chair.

"Adrian dear," she continued, "I need your help. You may smoke."

He smiled a charming smile and lit a fat, black cigar.

"Thank you, my love. And now—what?"

She poised her amethyst-topped gold pencil like a field marshal's baton.

"Adrian dear, we have thirty thousand dollars a year."

"I know. Quite enough for people of our modest taste."

"It was enough twenty—ten—even five years ago. But the cost of living is rising every day. We are not extravagant. But—we must retrench."

Adrian Van Twilliger sighed.

"Goodness!" he said. "And there's that corking lot of 1878 Forster Jesuitengarten out of old Van Dusen's cellar I was going to bid for. . . ."

"Yes! And the thirty-first pearl for my necklace!" He had given her a magnificent Oriental pearl, carefully matched and graded, on every anniversary since their wedding.

"And our new motorcar!" he suggested.

"And that lovely Chantilly lace Marie was going to bring me from Paris—she sent a sample. . . ."

"And the Cordova hangings we were going to get up at Sloane's for my downstairs smoking-room!"

"And the new sleeping porch up at Elmsdale!"

"And that lot of Havana imports I was going to split with Bob McClellan!"

"Yes!" she summarized. "This and that—and again this. I have figured it out. Every cent of it. And, to do it all, we need five thousand dollars more. Five thousand dollars more a year!

He shook his head, rather hopelessly.

"I don't know what to say, Julia dear. Our income is paid us out of a trust fund. Thirty thousand dollars a year—neither more nor less. There is no elasticity, no margin, no stretching either way. I am afraid we'll have to do without the sleeping porch and the lot of Havana imports and the Chantilly lace and. . . ."

"No, Adrian dear! We are going to cut out five thousand dollars—but—" she smiled—"we are going to cut it out where we can—and spend it where we please!"

"What do you mean?"

"Look here!" She showed him a certain page in her account book. "This is our yearly expenditure, dissected as I told you into its elemental components."

He read. There were four simple items.

First the household expenses which included everything except the personal expenses of the Van Twilliger family, and amounted to fifteen thousand dollars.

Then three items, as follows:

Mr. Van Twilliger.....	$5,000
Mrs. Van Twilliger.....	5,000
Miss Van Twilliger.....	5,000
	$15,000
Sum total, including household expenses	$15,000
	$30,000

"But what can we do, my love?" he mused.

"We shall eliminate one of these three five thousand dollar items."

"Which one?"

"The last! Priscilla!"

"But—how?" He flicked the ash from his cigar. "How? Priscilla is not an extravagant child."

"Marriage, Adrian dear," Mrs. Van Twilliger announced in a tone of finality and while he sighed and looked worried—for he was familiar with his daughter's view on love and marriage—she called her maid.

"Roberts," she said, "ask Miss Priscilla to come here."

And a minute later her daughter came into the boudoir, looking charming in her little rounded corsage which spoke eloquently of the Third Empire and the Rue Royale and casually of Fifth Avenue, and her underdress of silver lace frills, with floats and flutes of transparent chiffon.

"I am sorry, Mother dear," she smiled. "I have not much time. We have a rehearsal up at the Lonnings. You know—for the charity fête. Dress rehearsal. How d'you like mine?"

"Lovely, my dear. You are playing in that Watteau scene—together with young Cornelius de Graaf, I believe?"

"Yes, Mother."

She looked up sharply, suspiciously, a faint note of defiance creeping into her voice.

"Priscilla," went on Mrs. Van Twilliger, "I wish to speak to you about Cornelius. . . . No!" to her husband who was trying to leave the room softly. "You must stay here, Adrian dear. It is your responsibility as much as mine. And now—" turning again to her daughter—"listen! Your father and I have decided that you must marry. Soon!"

"I . . . I have not . . ." stammered Mr. Van Twilliger, but his wife continued, quite unruffled:

"You have, dear. Remember your Havana imports, your Forster Jesuitengarten, the Cordova hangings for your smoking-room! Yes, Priscilla, we have decided that you must marry."

"Why?" asked the girl, flushing pink.

"Because . . ." Mrs. Van Twilliger hesitated, then spoke out bravely, "because you are a luxury which we cannot afford any longer. You cost us five thousand dollars a year—"

"Well worth it, darling, well worth it," cut in Mr. Van Twilliger, who was growing more unhappy by the second, but his wife went on, as if she had not heard:

"Five thousand dollars. A sixth of our income, and we are getting old, your father and I, and the cost of living is rising steadily. Why, child, it may seem heartless, but—it is only fair."

"Fair?" cried the girl.

"Yes. Fair—towards us, your parents—and have you a right to expect that life should be less fair toward us, because we are old, than towards you, because you are young? We love you, dearest. We want your happiness."

She drew the girl to her and caressed her cheeks. "But you are—yes!—you are an Economic Problem! As such, you must be solved!"

"Mother!" exclaimed Priscilla, outraged, drawing away.

But the older woman continued quite calmly:

"Yes. You are an Economic Problem, and the solution for you, and for us, is your marriage."

She looked at her husband, mutely demanding support, and he did his best.

"Your mother is right, daughter," he said. "You must marry. And why not? Cornelius de Graaf is a nice, clean chap. Good family. Good-looking. Well-to-do. You have grown up together. And you are fond of each other—aren't you, dear?"

"Yes, Father," murmured Priscilla.

"Well—there you are!" said Mr. Van Twilliger, with an effort at ruddy joviality. "What are you waiting for? Go ahead and get married, like two good little kiddies!"

"I . . . I . . . we . . ." stammered the girl. She hid her head in her

mother's ample bosom. Her words came out choked and halting:

"He—he has never asked me, Mother dear!"

If she had expected to find sympathy, she was destined to be mistaken. For her mother coughed impatiently.

"Priscilla," she said, "I love you. But you are a goose. I have told you often—goodness knows how often—that a man never proposes."

"But—Julia dear!" from Mr. Van Twilliger.

"I know what you are going to say," countered his wife, "but you are mistaken. You did not propose to me. The initiative was mine. Naturally, since I am a woman."

Again she turned to her daughter:

"Priscilla, I have watched you, and I have noticed that you treat Cornelius —no—not as a stranger. That wouldn't be so bad. But as a brother. As a man whom you can trust absolutely. And that is a mistake. It is insulting to his manhood. No man likes to be trusted—quite! You must encourage him, indirectly. You must give him a chance to feel wicked, and as soon as he feels wicked you must give him another chance—a chance to show his nobler nature—so that he can make up for his wickedness—by proposing marriage!"

"I shan't do any such thing!" The girl was frankly mutinous. Her fine, bluish-black eyes blazed. "I shan't. I'd rather go away and work in a factory —or nurse—or—something. I have my own principles about life and men and women. I do not believe in treating marriage like a game, which you play with a line and a hook and bait and . . ."

"A sucker!" broke in Mr. Van Twilliger, to be silenced at once by his wife, who asked him to leave the room—"I must speak to your daughter in private, Adrian"; and when he, more than willing, had closed the door behind him, she turned again to Priscilla.

"You want to get married. Yes or no?"

"I . . . I . . ."

"Yes or no?"

"Yes!"

"Good!" Mrs. Van Twilliger smiled. Here was a card turned down in her favor. "And—oh—you would accept Cornelius de Graaf if he proposed to you? . . . All right," seeing the confusion in her daughter's face, "you needn't answer. You would say yes if he proposed. Very well. Make him propose. That's common sense."

"I shan't!" repeated Priscilla, her sentimental young-girlish ingenuousness dropping from her like a cloak.

Something like the fanaticism of a crusader came into her eyes. Up went her right hand, palm outward in the approved style of the Suffrage platform.

She spoke with a firm, hard voice,

"The feminine intelligence has long enough. . . ."

That was as far as she got.

For her mother interrupted her with a snort and an impatient:

"Nonsense! Don't tell me anything about modern ideas, my dear. Love is not modern. Nor is sex. Men and women have not changed since I was your age."

"They have, too!"

"Silly! The only difference is that you girls are becoming more foolish every year. We, thirty years ago, used to suffer from wind and Ouida and moral antimacassars and ethical ormolu. While you of the new generation—with your ideas about the psychology of love and marriage and eugenics and economic independence and feminism and half a dozen other fads—why!" She shrugged her shoulders. "There's exactly one way to catch a man. . . ."

"I do not want to *catch* a man, Mother!"

"You do. Nor need you be ashamed of trying to catch the man you love—when you know that he loves you. And now—" she settled back comfortably in her chair, "I shall tell you the system."

II

THE girl was hurt. The very idea of speaking about a "system" when it

was a question of love, the finest, biggest, sweetest adventure in the world!

But—suddenly her thoughts whirled—why, she herself had always treated all human emotions like drab questions in the Rule-of-Three, had always made a point of dissecting the heart and the soul, of trying to find out what made men and women tick. Surely, her mother had the same right.

So she did not reply a word, while Mrs. Van Twilliger continued calmly:

"It is the system of—ahem—Stolen Apples."

This time Priscilla replied. Just one word, uttered in a sort of horrified staccato:

"Mother!"

"Don't be shocked. It isn't as bad as it sounds. Too, your father once told me that it has theological sanction—considering the intermezzo in the Garden of Eden, with the snake. I am not asking you to compromise yourself with young Cornelius—roadhouse—all that—you know. But, don't you see, all men, including Cornelius de Graaf, have had their little affairs."

"Cornelius has not!"

Mrs. Van Twilliger smiled.

"He has! With girls of a different class of society from ours, of course. Let me tell you how he does it—and how the girl does it. It's the latter which really matters to you."

"I do not want to know."

"Nonsense! You *do* want to know. If only from mere blessed girlish curiosity. I . . ."

"How do you happen to know so much about it?" cut in Priscilla sarcastically.

"Your father told me—and my brothers. They think—poor dears—that it is a great secret of the male, and once in a while, when they need help—as your father did and my brothers—they confide in a woman—a clever, broad-minded woman like myself, who, of course, knew all about it before they had a chance to open their mouths—since I have used the corresponding system myself, against the male! Listen, dear—" She spoke slowly, with a certain academic unction. "The young man—Cornelius de Graaf, for instance—meets a young girl. A young girl, let us say, from Brooklyn, or Flatbush, or Flushing, or the Bronx. . . ."

"How *could* Cornelius meet such a girl?"

"Aha! How? That's the question. But he does. He talks to her—on the street, in a shop, a street car. . . ."

"Mother!"

"I tell you he does! He meets her according to the Stolen Apples system, away from the protective bosom and the carved golden oak sideboard of her family home—in Brooklyn—or Flatbush—or the Bronx—or—" Mrs. Van Twilliger's knowledge of New York City geography was vague, "the Borough of Queens generally. She likes his looks, smiles, answers. She is clever. She does not play the insulted. For she, too, unbeknown to him, is familiar with the system. Very well. He talks to her of love—at once—"

"No!"

"Yes! At once! Why—they have nothing else in common to talk about, have they, my dear? Cornelius is delighted. A sweet little family girl—he says to himself—and he has conquered her with his manly charms. A secret love affair—Stolen Apples! And then they have two or three rendezvous, a few motor rides into the country, supper somewhere on the Boston Road—and then. . . ."

"Mother!"

"Don't interrupt me all the time, please. Also, don't be previous. Cornelius is a gentleman, I trust. He does nothing wrong. He belongs to the new generation—he prefers feeling noble to enjoying himself. But he—what is the slang term—yes!—he fell for the Stolen Apples system, unaware of the fact that the girl is clever—more clever than girls of his own class, like yourself, for instance—and that she is familiar with the same system. The girl's parents, too, know the system— from their particular angle—"

"I thought Cornelius had a secret

love affair. If so, he doesn't know the parents."

"That's what he thought. But—well—they know him! Daughter spoke about him. Well—her father is a mason, or a bricklayer, or an express driver, or . . . what do I know? At all events, he belongs to the class of society which your dear father calls the people with muscles and no foreheads. And then—"

"And then?" echoed Priscilla, who was curious in spite of herself.

"One fine romantic, sentimental, soft spring evening, when Cornelius' little steel-grey roadster pulls up in back of the gas tower—in the Bronx, or Flatbush, or Brooklyn—instead of the girl, out comes a gentleman with a beard and a hairy cap and a corncob pipe and a wretched accent and a glitter in his eyes. And he greets Cornelius with the words: 'I am Maisie's father—and I'd like to know what your intentions are in regard to my daughter!' If that had happened forty years ago Cornelius would have replied—I know of just such a case—"You ask me what are my intentions in regard to your daughter, sir? All right. I'll tell you. My intentions are dishonorable, sir—strictly dishonorable!' But Cornelius belongs to the new generation, the conscientious, analytical generation—your own generation, Priscilla dear—and so he stammers and blushes. 'I—I didn't mean to compromise your daughter,' he says—and then Maisie's father has him where he wants him. He is given the choice between—"

"Marrying the girl and dying?" the girl asked, breathlessly.

"Heavens, no! Cornelius isn't a coward. Brute force wouldn't be a convincing argument with him. The plumber—or bricklayer—or whatever he is—knows that, too. He knows all about the wave of conscientious sentimentality which has swept over the rich—he talks sentiment, duty, nobility—and so Cornelius has the choice—"

"What choice?" impatiently from Priscilla.

"The choice between paying the three thousand dollars which he offers—and the ten thousand dollars which the paternal bricklayer demands. Maisie's people do not want her to marry Cornelius. They would think it a mésalliance. They belong to the Union and look down upon a man like him. They want their daughter to marry the red-haired Irish grocer around the corner. And so Cornelius gets caught in the mazes of the Stolen Apples system—and he pays—cash!"

"What has this—this system—to do with Cornelius—and me?"

"Everything, darling. Cornelius likes the system. It gives a certain spice and flavor to his life—a spice of danger, of adventure, of wickedness—*and* finally nobility! And you . . .? Of course, I am not asking you to copy everything Maisie does. For instance, it would be dreadfully silly to meet Cornelius behind a gas tower. Nor shall I ask your father to corner the boy and ask him his intentions. Adrian is a dear—but I could never persuade him to do that. Still, there are other ways. For instance. . . ."

"I will not listen any more, Mother!" cried the girl, suddenly furious. "How—how can you talk like that? You make me feel ashamed for you, for myself, for our whole sex! Love—love isn't a game—nor a science—nor a business. . . ."

"But—"

"No, no, no! I shan't listen! Why—you talk like a w-w-wicked old woman in a French novel!"—and she burst into sobs and rushed out of the boudoir, while Mrs. Van Twilliger looked after her, rather surprised, and murmured to herself:

"Heavens above! I am quite positive Priscilla must have misunderstood me. I didn't mean to . . ."

A minute later she was her usual bland, charming self.

Two minutes later a certain thought had come to her which seemed to be amusing as well as comforting, for her clear old eyes puckered in a smile and she rubbed her hands with every sign of inner satisfaction.

And three minutes later, when her husband came into the room, she greeted him with a cheerful:

"Adrian, you are just the man I want to see."

"Have you persuaded Priscilla?"

"No."

Adrian Van Twilliger sighed.

"Lord—what *are* we going to do?"

He pointed at the household account book with its accusing columns of figures.

"The first thing to do is to order your Forster Jesuitengarten, your Havana imports, my thirty-first pearl, the . . ."

"But—I thought you had not succeeded in—ahem—solving our charming little Economic Problem?"

"Do not ask me any questions, Adrian dear. Just do what I beg you."

"Yes, my love."

He inclined his head.

He knew, by a lengthy gamut of marital experiences, when his wife had arrived at a decision and, at once, he ceased to worry.

"Are you going to the club this afternoon?" she asked as he rose.

"I will if you wish me to."

"Thank you, my dear. And, if you should happen to see Cornelius de Graaf there, ask him up to our house for dinner tonight, if he has no previous engagement. Small, informal dinner—tell him. Just the four of us—quite *en famille*. By the way—" as her husband was about to leave the room, "I shall give Priscilla grandmother's emerald and pearl tiara as a wedding present."

"Wedding present? Wha—what do you mean?"

Mrs. Van Twilliger smiled—a smile which, in a woman not of her breeding and social position, would have been called crafty, vulpine.

"Never mind, Adrian dear. But if you want to save time, go down to Whaley's and order the cards."

"What cards?"

"Oh, the usual—*'Mr. and Mrs. Adrian Cuyper Van Twilliger announce the engagement of their only daughter Priscilla to Mr. Cornelius de Graaf—'*"

"You—you mean that?"

"Yes! Cornelius is going to propose tonight!"—there was a cold glitter in her eyes.

"Extraordinary woman! Might have been a General!" murmured Mr. Van Twilliger as he closed the door behind him.

III

When, that evening, Mr. Cornelius de Graaf was shown into the yellow salon, Priscilla looked at him with a certain curiosity which partook of apprehension. She knew, of course, that the story which her mother had told about him and the girl named tentatively Maisie and, as tentatively, the daughter of a Bronx bricklayer, was hypothetical. But—suppose something similar to the hypothetical case had happened to Cornelius—might happen—was going to happen in the future?

Here was a bully chance to analyze hypothetical *if's*, a juicy bit for psychological teeth to chew on, a gorgeous opportunity to play the pessimistic idealist—and Priscilla Van Twilliger rose to it.

Her mother had come into the salon and had engaged Cornelius in animated conversation, and so she could study him without his noticing it and, in consequence, making her feel self-conscious. He was good-looking—there was no doubt of it—with his splendid, solid, bony frame, his breadth of shoulder and depth of chest, his dark curly hair, the short upper lip with the little mustache accentuating the curve of the mouth, the healthy, round face sloping to a cleft chin—and the grey, deep-set eyes. Formerly she had thought that Cornelius' eyes mirrored a certain sound, homely simplicity, a certain rough, unself-conscious decency and goodness.

But—had she not been mistaken in her analysis of his character? What about the hypothetical Maisie—the Stolen Apples?

Why—what about . . .

She cut off the thought in mid-air.

Deep down in her earnest, shrill little feminine soul she realized that she was about to become jealous—"hypothetically' jealous. She did not want to think about Cornelius de Graaf. She decided that he did not interest her—not in the least. She drew her soft lips into the nearest approach to a thin, steely line she could master, and when her father came in and, a minute later, the butler announced that dinner was served, she walked into the dining-room by the side of Cornelius, her eyes stubbornly searching the floor, her mind and soul heavy with an ill-assorted pabulum of mutinous, irregular thoughts.

No!—she said to herself, as Cornelius placed her chair, she did not want to know about him. Even suppose she had once cared for him, her own mother had polluted the charm, the romance, the glory of it with her wicked, wire-drawn worldly-wisdom.

So, while sherry and hors d'œuvres were being served, she only opened her mouth to say "Yes" or "No" or "Indeed" or "You don't say so" when Cornelius spoke to her.

The result was that the latter, who had really looked forward to the little intimate dinner and had accepted Mr. Van Twilliger's invitation with alacrity, felt first astonished, then hurt, then obstinate, then—since he was young—stupid, and gave similar replies to his host who, obeying his wife's strategic cough, drew him into conversation—with a rather too consummate endeavor after genial ease which made matters worse.

Adrian Van Twilliger was worried. For the dinner promised to be a flat failure, in spite of the fact that the soup *mongole* was good, the caviare of the most approved molossol variety, big-grained and unsalted, the filet de sole served with a pink mussel sauce which M. Marguery himself could not have surpassed, the Chateau Yquem oily and flower-scented, and the Port as crusty as an elderly Major of Marines.

"Yes—"

"No—"

"Yes—"

"No—"

"Yes—" Cornelius and Priscilla replied, like two sulky children.

"Indeed—"

"You don't say so—" like the responses in some tiresome litany.

They hardly took the trouble to look up from their plates, and Adrian Van Twilliger was growing more nervous by the minute. He looked across at his wife, who sat there like a well-fed, rosy-skinned, white-haired sphinx. But he had been married long enough to understand her every mood and gesture, and when she winked at him slowly he knew that, somehow, she was not displeased at the way things were progressing.

So he ceased to worry and turned again to Cornelius de Graaf with various "that reminds me, my boy . . ." which were received with flat, disheartening "Ohs."

It was when the roast and burgundy were brought on the mahogany that a certain change came; first over Cornelius; and then over Priscilla. It came quite suddenly, unexpectedly, without any apparent reason, and Adrian Van Twilliger was frankly puzzled.

He was in the midst of a lengthy anecdote and the younger man was listening with scrupulous and supremely bored civility.

"Oh—rather, Mr. Van Twilliger," he had just said when, all at once, he looked away from his host—and at Priscilla—with an expression in his eyes of incredulity, surprise, pleasure and delight.

She caught the look, and blushed.

He smiled—an odd little, knowing smile. A second later he seemed to have forgotten all about Mr. Van Twilliger and Mr. Van Twilliger's lengthy anecdotes and was turning to Priscilla with a volley of small talk about quite young things—

"I say, Priscilla," he commenced, "do you remember—that day with the Meadowbrook. . . ."

"Why, yes, Cornelius. . . ."

And when the bombe praliné and the coffee came on the table, the dining-room was divided into two camps: Cornelius de Graaf and Priscilla laughing, talking, reminiscing, childishly happy, and with a certain undertow of expectant excitement; and Mr. and Mrs. Van Twilliger—the former puzzled, but pleased—and the latter calm, serene and smiling.

IV

At half past ten that evening Cornelius asked Mr. and Mrs. Van Twilliger for the hand of their daughter, and was accepted.

Ten minutes later he was sitting on the couch in the music room, with his arm around Priscilla's waist.

And, at just about the same time, Mr. Van Twilliger was smoking a cigar in his wife's boudoir.

"How did it happen, Julia?" he asked, still dazed.

She was in the act of blue-pencilling the column in her account book which was entitled: "Miss Priscilla Van Twilliger."

"Adrian dear," she commenced—she blushed, and was silent.

"Tell me, my love, how did it happen? Don't you know?"

"Of course I know. I did it."

"You did it? What did you do?"

"I—" again she blushed, then she spoke out bravely. "I—I decided to encourage Cornelius—to—to give him a taste of Stolen Apples. I—"

"Well?"

"I played—*footie* with him!" She brought out the word as if it choked her. "And he—Cornelius—thought it was Priscilla's foot!"

And upstairs, in the music room, Cornelius and Priscilla wondered at the peals of laughter which drifted down from Mrs. Van Twilliger's boudoir.

EVOLUTION

By Roderic Parker

ONCE when we swung from a tree by our long tails you offended me. I clutched a hard, brown cocoanut in my hairy hand and hurled it at your head.

Once when we were savage man and woman dwelling in a dark cave and tearing the raw flesh of animals with our teeth, you offended me. I seized a large sharp stone and aimed it at your face.

Tonight you have offended me. I shall smile at the beautiful woman at the next table. . . . .

THERE is no such thing as "the dearest woman in the world." There is, however, the nearest woman in the world.

HOW ANY WIFE MIGHT ACT

By Randolph Mason

IN an agony of self-reproach, she went over the causes of the scene which had driven him from her.

An unseasonably warm day; a tiresome fitting at the dressmaker's; a block in the stuffy subway; a stupid maid who had neglected to order food from the tradespeople! There had been some excuse for her irritability. Yet—

Jim had come home. Good old Jim, with his ready smile and his almost unfailing good-nature! She couldn't remember the words with which she had started the uncalled-for quarrel. But she recalled only too plainly the hurt expression which had come into his boyish eyes at her first absurd accusation. What a fool she had been! What a vulgar, commonplace scold!

And as there drifted back to her memory the words that had at last broken down his tolerance of her temper, she tore at the sheets in wrath at herself.

"Go back to your blonde stenographer! I'm tired of your deceit and lies!"

That last silly outburst and he had gone. How gladly she would give five—ten years of her life to take back the wicked words. She laughed hysterically at the idea of Jim—her Jim—possessing even a passing interest in the anemic, yellow-haired little idiot who sat at a desk in his front office.

Jim was gone, possibly never to return. Never to return!

What a horrible idea! It beat against her brain and drove her frantic with grief. Of what use was her life without Jim? Unconsciously melodramatic, she snapped her fingers in the darkness to express its value to her. She began to consider ways and means of self-destruction.

She crept from her bed to the dresser on the other side of the room. From a drawer she extracted her husband's automatic and scurried back between the sheets. Here was a quick, clean way out! She fondled the blue steel weapon of destruction and wept as she pictured how still and pathetic she would look in the morning when her maid came to call her for her bath and found her—dead!

The downstairs door opened and closed.

Familiar steps were on the stairs.

Hurriedly, she thrust the pistol beneath her pillow.

She sat bolt upright, waiting.

Her husband entered the room, snapping on the electricity as he crossed the threshold.

"Hello, dear! Still awake?" he asked.

She glared at him.

"Yes," she said in acid tones, "still awake, waiting for you to come home and apologize for the abominable way in which you treated me this afternoon."

THE MOVIE MANIAC

By Ben Hecht

IN the beginning, Wilbur Omar Brown was a thin, saccharine gentleman whose words and deeds on remote occasions almost shed the stamp of asininity which seemed to be inherently theirs. He would, in the midst of his usual babbling, reveal a sudden shrewdness, a cunning, a knowledge perhaps of the population of Borneo, the date of the battle of Marathon, the height of the highest mountain in the world. But such unexpected illuminations from this Brown's brain served chiefly to reveal the natural darkness which it inhabited. Did he let loose one flash of humor, did he uncork one ray of intellect, it but provided vivid evidence of his general witlessness. He had two children, which, to a sensitive observer, was perhaps the most irritating thing about him.

These children, picturesque and buxom, furnished him with a fatuous pride. Himself, thin, colorless, inutile, Brown pointed them out as his own, spoke vaingloriously and in his squeaking voice of inherited staminas, of untainted family physiques handed down from generation to generation. In their presence he swelled to heroic proportions, he assumed a faint virility of gesture and discoursed darkly concerning primitive instincts.

"We must not disparage the primitive instincts," he would pipe, removing his thick-lensed glasses and throwing out his spavined chest.

"We must not talk sneeringly of the evidences of the brute in man," he would go on, stroking his skinny knees and regard you with a vague, watery eye. "Yes, sir; without our primitive instincts we would be an uninteresting lot!"

Of such minor eccentricities, little derelicts knocking about within his more or less vacant soul, Brown had his fulsome share. As for his vices, they were more uninteresting if possible than his virtues. He was, summing it up for the moment, one of those born wallflowers of life.

There are some people in whom virtue and vice are the direct results of cowardice. Thus you will find hypocrisy and honesty walking hand in hand; purity and nastiness occupying the same cells, nobility and meanness throbbing together within the same bosom—all forming the little empty enigma known as the bourgoisie.

Thinking it over carefully, such a fellow was Brown.

Of his private life there is this to say. In the beginning—take shrewd notice of the dramatic value of this clause—in the beginning he was a copy reader on a Chicago newspaper. He sat at a flat topped desk from 7 A. M. to 3 P. M. everyday except Sundays. It was his duty to read a certain proportion of the stories turned in by the reporters of the paper to the city editor and handed over by that dignitary to the copy desk. Reading these stories he would insert punctuation, correct grammar, delete dubious remarks, annihilate what might be libelous, add a few "it is saids" and "it is allegeds" to statements which seemed too strong. This done he would crown his achievements by the construction of a heading.

Thus, if it was a story concerning the coldness of the day and the misery of the poor as observed by the reporter from a bench in the County Agent's

office, he, Brown, would with great concentration, counting of letters, biting his lips, inscribe:

B-R-R-R! Chicago Shivers.
Mercury Drop Brings Want.
Poor Plead for Fuel
Harrowing Scenes In County Agent's Office
While One Woman Sobs Woe.
Cold Wave to Continue.

If it were a story concerning some court proceedings, and most of them were alike, Brown would perpetrate:

Judge Raps Romeo.
Wife Sobs Woe In Court.
Sad Climax to Romantic Elopement.
Struck Her, Bride Alleges.

In the conduct of this business he was regarded, as are all unoriginal, unimaginative creatures, as a reliable and competent workman. His day's work over, Brown would gather under his arm a half dozen newspapers and depart for home. He seldom spoke to any member of the staff, although it was typical of him to pause for a few moments and listen to the ceaseless anecdoting among the men, inserting some illuminating remark before passing on, such as:

"I hardly see how that man could have attended an embassy dinner in Hong Kong. There is no embassy there."

At four o'clock he was home and thenceforth his life underwent a soothing expansion.

Mrs. Brown, a vivid looking, matter-of-fact minded woman of thirty, was still in love with her husband. The two picturesque and buxom children greeted him loyally. Mrs. Brown kissed him, inquired if he were weary, instructed him concerning the mid-day doings of her neighbors and leisurely busied herself about the preparations in the kitchen.

Her love for her husband was not a romantic fancy. Nor was it anything remotely lyrical.

She admired him in a homely way as one admires a serviceable raincoat, a good brand of tobacco, a pleasing ride in an automobile. She was fond of his unruffled manners, was pleased with his quiet voice, his calm, his shyness in company, his modesty before friends.

Altogether, she saw in his weak effaciveness something she called dignity and reserve. In his general witlessness she saw the conservatism of a deep brain, in his impassive and unemotional conduct she perceived the respect and deference of a true gentleman.

During the course of her married life she had adjusted her ideals until they pleasantly coincided with the proportions of Wilbur and she was happy in an aimless, unproductive manner. She had, however, observed of late a tendency of her husband to discourse concerning what he termed the primitive instincts of the race. It had begun with the war and with his planting of a patriotic garden in a patch behind their apartment building. This puny agriculture, Wilbur made known to his friends, was the grim workings of the primitive instincts coming back into the world. After some slight irritation Mrs. Brown began to be vaguely proud of the idea, as she was of most of the intellectual advances made by her husband.

"They are nothing to disparage," he quoted to her. "Patriotism, love, honor, all the fine things you know, as well as the brutal things, are nothing but primitive instincts. We ought all of us to be more natural. Civilization has done that, taken away our naturalness. We ought to exercise our primitive instincts more, so to speak, wherever we can do so honestly, conveniently, without injury."

Then—I will skip the other myriad placidities of the fellow's existence—then, by one of those haphazard strokes of fortune, Brown was selected by his editor to fill a vacancy left in the staff by the departure of Mr. Joe Corbin. Mr. Corbin had been the moving picture critic. He had departed to become a scenario writer for a corporation whose work he had, as critic, ably and consistently admired.

Thus for no reason at all, except perhaps his general worthlessness for any task involving sparkle or ingenuity, Brown found himself seated at his new desk, a pile of press agent communications under his nose, a pass to all the movie theaters in his pocket, a new future confronting him.

It is the congenital conviction of ninety persons out of ninety-one—and I have never encountered the ninety-first—that they are peculiarly fitted for the career of dramatic critic. Your genial mono cell, hesitating over the composition of a letter to his congressman inquiring after seeds, your impassive yokel shuddering before the task of answering an invitation to the grand dinner and ball of Lodge 15, Local 21; your salt of the earth working himself into a lethal fever arranging an inquiry after some unwary domestic to be inserted in the want ad column of his favorite evening gazette, all these intricately illiterate persons will accept boldly, eagerly, merrily the position of critic of literature, art, drama on any daily, weekly or monthly gazette, and do. Modesty, shyness, effaciveness perish in the birth of a miraculous assurance.

The anointed step forth from their oblivion. Culture, cunning, infallibility drop upon them from some Olympian height. They become, these troglodytes, by some process of cellular evolution too swift to follow with the naked eye, dictators of the nation's esthetic values. Which merely goes to show that all of us are born critics—at the rate of one every minute.

II

THESE remarks, though general and blurred, have yet a specific bearing upon the case of Wilbur Omar Brown.

Seated at his new desk, this Brown contemplated with a new, an almost brazen light in his little watery eyes, the future which had opened for him. Within him he felt hitherto untapped springs bouncing to the surface. He experienced in less than fifteen minutes a swift, radiant growth of power in his soul, of ability, genius.

He had, like his innumerable counterparts, a vague notion concerning moving pictures, a vaguer notion concerning drama, an almost indistinct, unborn notion concerning art.

It was his habit to frequent the movie theaters once or twice a week and gaze with a vacuous interest upon the black and white animations before him, to listen with an insensible ear to the musical distortions of the orchestra whose clamor he confused with the merits of the film, to applaud with rare humor the advertisement of his favorite laundry when it was flashed upon the screen, to read out loud the significant epistle which the hero had a moment previous clutched despairingly and thrust from him in clenched fist, to rise solemnly when the aforesaid orchestra played the national anthem, prophesy shrewdly and in whispers the fact that the villain would be exposed and the old mother saved from a consumptive's grave by the anti-toxin the hero had invented.

But these characteristics were of the past.

As he sallied from his new desk a spring was in his step. He thought of the millions awaiting his pronouncements, engaging in arguments over his opinions; he visioned his name upon ash barrels, ruined walls, and even awnings. And in these speculations there was no feeling of dubiousness. He moved hungrily upon his first theater. He seated himself with dignity upon his first critical throne. He narrowed his eyes.

Undoubtedly, during those first minutes at this particular theater Brown's temperament and critical attitudes underwent their moulding. Standards came to life in his brain, even as love dawns in the heart of the unsuspecting savage. Dogmas, prejudices, tastes all materialized with the same swift certainty.

The play, it so happened, was one in which a wealthy, doting husband returns unexpectedly home, finds his wife

in the arms of a stranger, overhears her remarks of her child, "And its nose is just like yours, dearest," as she strokes the nose of the stranger, contemplates murder, is thwarted by a defective shell in the revolver, departs into a cold world, becomes a lumber jack in the Far North and is known as Silent Jim, roams the forest primeval registering anguish with long toe dragging steps, breaks down and weeps while chopping trees, cuts off his toe and faints, is carried to a hospital by the faithful, simple lumber jacks, finds his wife has become a nurse in this same hospital, curses her, but learns to his bewilderment that the stranger who embraced her and whose nose she said the child's nose resembled, was none other than her long lost brother just returned from India.

At this point in the play Brown rubbed his little watery eyes with his handkerchief and with bated breath watched while the wife and husband, (whose sore toe underwent an instantaneous cure as a result of the aforesaid revelation concerning the brother from India), walked slowly toward the horizon, while the sun, setting quickly, left her a silhouette with wind toussled hair upon a hill top and him a silhouette pointing with spread fingers over a valley below, the caption for this twilight reconciliation being, "A New Dawn."

Never before, as has been perhaps, painfully indicated, had Brown viewed such proceedings as at present.

"A play of primitive instincts," he said to himself, "done with a wonderful attention to human nature and full of fine details and thrills."

He rambled on to himself in this vein and as he moved out of the lobby he held his head high, he walked with a peculiarly drawn out step.

His review of this film masterpiece, as he called it, appeared in the paper the next day under his name. It was couched in those sober and pompous inanities which enrolled him at once as an able upholder of the ideals of his new profession.

III

Brown's pride in his success, the inevitable changes in his manner occupied little of my attention. His was the usual inflation which comes into the souls of little men when they step out of their merciful anonymity. At home this inflation expressed itself in certain formalities of speech and conduct which he seemed to acquire overnight. A curious consciousness crept into his talk, an impressiveness freighted his utterance.

As the days passed the change became less apparent. His acquaintances forgot the colorless inutile Brown of the past and took the new creature of dignity and importance for granted.

Even in his home this subtle adjustment went on.

Mrs. Brown, at first somewhat confused in the process, soon added the fellow's new mannerisms to the other ideal qualities which he possessed. Of his writings, now appearing each day in the newspaper, she was modestly proud, clipping and pasting them in a large book, as behooved the helpmeet of a literary genius.

"The screen," said Brown to her one evening (he never referred to the thing as the movies anymore), "is the greatest single benefactor of the race. Art and life combine upon it. The primitive instincts of man and woman are revealed for the first time in the shadow drama. Heretofore these instincts have come to us in sugar-coated fashion through the artifices of the stage."

Just where Wilbur Omar Brown underwent the metamorphosis which ended in his domestic ruin is hard to determine. Undoubtedly it dated from the moment he sat himself down and fastened his eye upon his first screen drama.

In a month, however, the results of this metamorphosis became apparent.

Slowly, imperceptibly, Wilbur Omar Brown faded out of existence, leaving behind in this same slow and imperceptible way an automatic gesticulator —a Francis X. Bushman, a Bryant

Washburn. Day by day this strange eradication of a personality increased.

I did not see Brown to speak to for several months after he got his new position. When I did see him I almost failed to know him. In those three months, my little watery eyed, colorless friend, Wilbur Omar Brown, had disappeared.

He greeted me in an uncanny manner. His eyebrows shot up, his mouth opened, a light dawned slowly over his face. Then he suddenly thrust out his hand, seized mine, placed his other hand upon my shoulder and greeted me.

When he had concluded this operation he placed both hands on my shoulders, pushed me gently from him, stared into my eye with a mysterious rapture and ejaculated my name. For the moment I was baffled. There was something irritatingly familiar about his behavior. It was not Brown, and yet. . . .

"How is Mrs. Brown?" I asked.

His reply, or rather the manner of it, left me bewildered.

He closed his eyes even as I was asking the question, the lids fluttering. His spavined chest rose in a fearsome sigh. The look of joy utterly vanished from his face. He raised one hand and with spread fingers covered his forehead and nose. His other arm he thrust out sideways the first half clenched and curled back. At the same instant he staggered from me two short steps.

"What!" I stammered. "I'm sorry, Brown. I didn't know there was anything."

The spear fingers dragged themselves slowly from his face, the extended arm fell limply to his side, the shoulders sank, in fact collapsed. Brown's lips parted in a slanting laugh. He said nothing.

I chose to ignore the entire incident. It was a hot day. I put it out of mind. I began the conversation anew, picking out the most banal remark at my command.

"I got back two days ago," I said. "Had an ordinary trip."

Brown who had turned slightly from me and had been staring into space with his watery eyes, wheeled abruptly. A clenched fist jumped to his right jaw; he retreated two short steps and riveted me with the exclamation, "No!!!"

"Yes!" I cried.

There was something contagious about this horse-play.

Brown dropped a stiffened arm to his desk, the fingers of his hand extended. I perceived a peculiar tension about his entire figure. It gave him uncanny proportions.

We talked and as we talked I watched him, fascinated. He had become, in short, a theatricalism. His eyes flashed, his head turned abruptly from side to side Strange, inexplicable emotions contorted his face. His walk was a study in absolute artifice. I could ask him no question without bringing upon me the entire business of surprise, intelligence, doubt, hesitation, fear, and even anguish. His gestures were the ludicrous exaggerations of the movies. He had, it was evident, stepped out of the colorless routine of his copy reading days into some magnificent limbo.

IV

At first my bewilderment and growing irritation prevented me from observing to the full the fellow's manner. But as we moved from his desk, I having accepted more or less dazedly an invitation to accompany him to his home, I perceived the proportions of his mania.

When we encountered acquaintances Brown bowed low, his face registering a confusion of emotions. He was continually gripping my arm, making startling remarks, wheeling upon passers-by and fastening a fiery eye upon them.

I was, nevertheless, unable to get any information out of him. I sensed something on his mind, but he seemed incapable of voicing any sane thought.

When we arrived at his home the

secret was revealed. I found Mrs. Brown wasted away. A strange harassed glint was in her eyes. She bit her lip as Brown opened the door.

As for Brown, he stared at her for a moment and then thrust forward his arms in what seemed a mute appeal. Mrs. Brown lowered her head and a tear appeared on her cheek. Brown's arms fell to his side and he hesitated a moment. During this moment his face became contorted with emotions. Suddenly he advanced upon her, placing his left hand upon his heart, extending his other hand toward her, and exclaimed "Good evening."

Mrs. Brown glanced at me appealingly and then turned and fled. Brown entered his home. His gesticulating, if possible, appeared now to have increased. He accented the most trifling words with vast movements of his limbs and seemed altogether like some clown in a preposterous pantomime. Mrs. Brown appeared several times, her face pathetic in its pallor. After the dinner, which was as grotesque an affair as any I have ever attended, Mrs. Brown beckoned me aside. We left Brown sitting at his desk in the front room and composing, as he said, his critique for the morrow.

We were alone in her bedroom, whither she had led me. I noticed that a trunk stook packed against the wall, that room seemed stripped.

"I'm going away," Mrs. Brown said to me, "and I want to talk to you. Wilbur has frequently told me you were his friend. Your coming tonight may prove providential. I have already sent the children away. I was afraid he might affect them. But, I can't stand it any longer. I must leave."

She commenced to weep and I waited patiently until she resumed.

"It's been this way for at least two months, and is growing worse every day. He's gotten so he can't do anything but strut and mimic the terrible movie actors. He wakes up like that, he comes home like that he—he goes to sleep like that. He—he is terrible. If I could only tell you the things he does. They —they are shameful."

Again the tears, again the wait, again the resumption.

"He's so changed I don't know him. He's worse than a stranger. Oh, my nerves are gone. I shall die if I stay here with him. I can't ask him a question, I can't kiss him, I can't do anything but what he starts acting. It's those terrible moving pictures that have done it, just ruined and spoiled him. Can you do anything while I am away? I am going to my mother. Please try."

She ceased and put her hat on.

Before I could summon an answer which would be sufficiently ambiguous, she had started for the street.

"Here," she said, "give this to Wilbur. I don't want to see him again."

She handed me a letter and moved quietly out of the house.

I found Brown as I had left him, gesturing to himself, frowning and registering, in the usual ludricrous manner of the movies, "deep thought."

"Brown," I said, "your wife has just gone. She gave me this letter to give you."

He turned on me, springing to his feet. I settled back for an exhibition of unusual dramaturgy as he read the note. I was not disappointed. The fellow actually punctuated each sentence with the most insane struttings, walkings up and down and draggings of the toes, flourishings of the arms, bowings of the head, beatings of the bosom, I had ever seen. When he had finished he collapsed into a chair and sobbed.

I approached him sympathetically. He raised his face and beckoned me away with a stiff gesture. His grief was even as his other emotions—a thing of stilted and elaborate pantomime. I perceived that the artificiality which had possessed him had eaten its way into the depths of his consciousness.

"Ah," he cried, "she is gone . . . gone. . . . I should have known better than to . . . to . . . release the brute

in me. I must be careful. I must win her back."

He arose and paced the room, gesturing, grimacing in a preposterous manner.

"The brute in me," he murmured. "That is what comes of unleashing the primitive instincts. . . . Man naked . . . man unadorned. . . ."

He paused trembling.

Removing his thick lensed glasses he stroked his skinny knees, and then suddenly rolled his eyes and fell forward in his chair.

I was about to spring to his assistance when I perceived that this final proceeding was merely another of his "registerings" and I paused.

Sure enough he raised himself, opened his eyes and murmured in his strange piping voice:

"Begone . . . begone . . . you are no true friend in muh need. I would be alone. I would suffer alone. No one can help me. I must fight this fight alone and if I am victorious, if I succeed in killing the brute in me, it will be by my own efforts."

I left him to his primitive instincts. That was a month ago. Mrs. Brown has since obtained a divorce, charging —cruelty.

I WONDER WHAT I SHALL DO

By George B. Jenkins, Jr.

SHE took advantage of my condition. Even though she knew I was not entirely responsible for my actions, even though she knew I was slightly sublimated, she accepted me when I proposed to her. And she *knew* that, when drunk, I always propose to the woman I am with. And yet she accepted me.

I wonder what I shall do. I can either go out and buy her an engagement ring, or— I think I will purchase me a few cocktails first. Perhaps I'll propose to a prettier girl this time.

WOMEN fall in love for strange reasons, . . . a man's cleft chin, his fascinating Past, their own first wrinkle. . . .

THERE is but one fault to find with discretion. There is always a tendency to carry it too far.

TRUE forgiveness is a masculine trait. A woman merely defers punishment.

AIR FOR THE OPHICLEIDE

By Sayers Coe

I GRASPED the tallest tree in the forests of the Northland, dipped it into the boiling cauldron of Vesuvius, and wrote on the burning sands of the Sahara Desert in letters ten miles high:

"I LOVE YOU."

I gathered together all the winds of the world, imprisoned them in a deep-gorged valley between two mighty mountain ranges, and forced them to roar with one great, wild voice:

"I LOVE YOU!"

I reached up and plucked the largest stars from the farthermost parts of the heavens, and flung them into infinite space to form the blazing words:

"I LOVE YOU!!'

And then I returned to the Maid of My Dreams to find that she had married a drug clerk who danced well.

WORSHIP

By Louis Untermeyer

NOW that I've won you, you complain
I have forgotten how to woo you;
My words, you say, have lost the strain
That drove the warm blood singing through you.

No longer do I celebrate
Your hair that shames the fire of Titian;
Nor swear your beauty is so great
That it would check a god's ambition.

It's true I do not run to say
That I am still your slave, your servant;
But I do honor in a way
That is less facile but more fervent.

I worship as a mortal can;
And something more than words must show it. . . .
I love you too much as a man
To want to love you as a poet!

THE POINT OF COLLISION

By Burton Kline

I

HOW little of the news gets into the newspaper only the journalist knows. He knows the truth, and prints what a genuine charity will let him. Disappearances that have baffled, self-killings that have mystified, are not always mysterious to him. He knows the hidden, and the true, course of many a business deal that is famous for fine, and fictitious, reasons. Marriageable daughters he has seen advertised with a subtlety and a skill that would have broken the heart of Barnum. He has heard judges decide the fate of lives and of fortunes on evidence wide of the facts. He is himself the witness who might jail or pillory more than one pompous figure. He is the silent witness who wishes he might speak the word to dignify more than one man unjustly ridiculed.

In any reporter is a potential Balzac or Dumas, lacking only the novelist's art, or the right and the time to employ it. The real American novels live in his memory, and die as he forgets. Policy and the libel law make him a wary custodian of his knowledge, and he keeps it for only the others of his craft. But what another sort of literature we should have if a record were kept of the talk when such men get together! Some of it surely should be saved. One thing especially that Johnson told, it is in the interest of public pity and understanding to set down.

II

JOHNSON told it. Johnson of the—but his particular paper matters little. A tall and broad man, Johnson—as broad in mind as he is of shoulder. Distinguished in appearance as well as in fact. Great shock of wavy white hair, his. Ruddy cheeks and a coal-black moustache. Handsomest of all, his kindly blue eye. And people are apt to listen when Johnson talks. Certainly our cigars went out, and the coffee grew cold as he told it that night.

He said:

Three—four—yes, it was four years ago. But I remember the night. Nothing in the office to do. Twelve o'clock. One of those utterly empty and barren nights when you are morally certain that something, that anything, is bound to happen at any second. And that night it happened.

The 'phone rang—for me. Friend of mine in the Blank & Blank Railroad offices called me up. Put his job in jeopardy for doing it, but he gave me the tip all the same. The "Owl" in a big wreck, twenty miles or more out of town. Many killed. God only knew how many more injured.

I yelled to the city ed. that it was my job, called a helper, and beat it. A taxi to the station. There a run and a jump for the special with the doctors and the superintendent aboard. Don't ask me how I got past. I don't know myself. Possibly my bag and my speed made me look like a surgeon.

Ever seen a wreck? Johnson asked abruptly. Or heard one? Anyway, you've heard a freight train "making up" in the yards at night. A loud bump when two sections of a train come together to be hooked up—a bump that travels along, car by car, to both ends of the train. Make that bump a thou-

sand times louder. Add a crash of splintering wood, with a clang of steel besides. No rattle of cars afterward. Just a moment of dead silence instead. Then a rush of steam. And shouts, and cries, and moans—if you're near enough to hear 'em. Maybe a red glare in the fog. Nearly always there's a drizzle or a fog. And you've heard a wreck.

And better hear than see one.

They had a derrick on the scene, and a car with a searchlight, when we got there. But the searchlight wasn't needed. Two or three old wooden coaches in the mess—and you know what happened. Blazing like a furnace. A pile of kindling wood heaped over—well, there was no counting them then. Not then. You could only hear them. We took out forty-nine—dead. Dead; that is, after a time. Twenty men. Twenty-three were women. The other six—

(Johnson cleared his throat.)

The other six were children. One of them I dragged out myself. A flaxen-haired little girl—probably six years old. I wish—I wish—she were alive—and were mine.

All in the train ahead, of course—the stalled local. The all-steel Limited got off nearly scot-free—all except the engine, the mail car, and the combination baggage. Naturally everybody in the Limited was badly shaken. Women bruised and hysterical. A lot of them cut by flying glass. I don't doubt that a dozen of them have bad cases of nerves right now, and have cost the road thousands of dollars in damages. Anyway, it was just one pandemonium then, till the "supe" got there and took hold. Wonderful fellow, that man Baynes. In twenty minutes he had that nasty row in the hollow of his hand.

Half a dozen college students, the members of a baseball team, and a few other men from both trains, stood by. Otherwise the Limited was hauled back to ——— with the injured. Special engine rushed up for the purpose. Then we fell to on the little that was left of the stalled local.

Such a tangle as that heap of kindling you never saw. Afire, and no help but an engine due from the nearest town two or three miles away. And people pinned down somewhere in that haystack of splinters. Some of them—some of them we didn't get in time. One fellow begged us, pleaded with us to chop off his leg. One of the heavy sills of the rear car was lying across him, too heavy to lift. The whole weight of that kindling was on his leg—and the fire creeping up. He prayed to die. I can hear him yet. We fought the fire instead—with the fire creeping up—hoping the surgeon could amputate before it reached him. I said the fire crept up. So did his wife.

(Again Johnson paused.)

Guess you don't want any more of that. But what did it all? The signals were all set. There they were, twinkling away just as they should. The flagman had gone back a quarter of a mile, with the engineer of the local working all the while like mad on his jammed brakes. The brakes on the Limited in perfect order. And the engineer of that Limited?

(Our eyes had already asked the question.)

Well, when I laid that little yellow-haired thing on the bank beside a fence, where we were lining them up and covering them with blankets from the Pullmans, I saw a man sprawled out on his face in the wet grass and cinders and splinters tossed out from the wreck. He seemed to be writhing in agony. I took hold of his hand to see what I could do for him, when he leaped up as if he had been shot. And then rolled over again. I saw his face.

A big cut over his forehead, and his face all scored and scratched. He recognized me—and I him. He sat up, when he saw who I was, and held out his hand, and held on to mine when I gave it. Lord, how he held on to my hand.

"How—how many are there?" he said. Said it twice, for he kept his face down between his knees and I could barely hear him.

I couldn't answer him, either; but he didn't wait for an answer.

"And I came through!"

Then he added:

"This far through!"

I said, "That's all right, Bill. This will clear up. You couldn't help it." It was all I could say. "It's awful, but it wasn't your fault."

He took on—I was going to say, as we always do, like a madman. But he was quiet instead. He just sat there. Couldn't take it in. Except once in a while when some glimmer of what had happened broke in on him. Then he pulled me down beside him—and sobbed—and gibbered some incoherent nonsense that I couldn't understand. Not then. I understood it later on.

But that ended my work on the wreck. The wreck of the cars, I mean. This second, this human wreck, and the bigger wreck, it has always seemed to me, took all my time.

III

PRETTY heavy thing to be responsible for, a happening like that. Not in hell itself—if one is needed after what we go through here—would I expect to see the like of that. It wasn't alone what had happened—though that was quite enough, thank you—that was biting into Bill. He was seeing a lot more than that. But think of being the engineer who sometimes lives through a wreck! We write wreck stories, and people read them. And always we say sarcastically that the engineer was killed as a matter of course. There's always the subconscious wish in us that the engineer might have lived, to see what he had done. And be punished for it, to the limit of the law. And so be made to stand as an example. Then our chiefs write sarcastic editorials, and taunt the railroads with always blaming the dead engineer—who was probably innocent, and overworked, and ground down by the greed of the road. You know it all by heart.

Believe me, it's a mercy when the engineer is killed. Think of having your life running along, smooth and honest. You're doing your work, and you're happy in it. You're doing your bit, and are getting something out of life. When all of a sudden such a thing falls across your path. . . . And then! Never to get that horrid vision out of your mind. Not a single detail of it. The man who was burned. The little golden-haired girl who was crushed. And the others. All of it. To wake up in the night and see it. And hear it. The crackling, and the cries. From a thing like that, if death were denied, insanity would be a merciful escape.

I heard it all from Bill, in his snatches of wild words. He was for sneaking away. For jumping into the fire. I knew, that night, the escape Bill was going to have—in the long run. And that's where he is now. Bill's safe enough. He doesn't hear the wreck any more. I wish I were as happy, as free from the cares of life, as Bill. He thinks he's Abraham Lincoln. Believes it. Swears it.

That's where he is now. But that night I persuaded him to see it through. To own up. Give himself up. I knew it was the only way. Fine fellow, Bill Byrnes. The man in him got the upper hand, even at a time like that.

I don't know anything, though, that shocked me more than to find Bill Byrnes there, in that awful fix, that night. Perfectly sober, as usual. He'd never touched a drop in all his life. High up in the Brotherhood, too; and well known. More than one fool strike on that road he'd used his wits to prevent. I'd written him up at the time. Got to know him. Straight as a die, that man Bill Byrnes. I couldn't understand it. Not then. I did later on. It's a funny tale!

(Johnson glanced about to see if we were still interested. And we were.)

Well, in good time they arrested Bill. Then came the coroner's inquest. Howls of indignation in the papers when Bill owned up. The signals had been set against him. He admitted that. Somehow he had just run on. Couldn't ex-

plain how he did it. Wool-gathering, gentlemen. The worst evil in railroading. Sometimes an engineer's mind will go blank—sometimes just because of the everlasting vigilance expected of it. You know yourselves if you look at any object steadily for a long time you cease to see it. Your mind will travel, in spite of you, to something else.

That's what happened to Bill Byrnes. He couldn't explain it. Not at that time. Later, when the daze had worn off, and he had time to think it out, he wouldn't explain. And he never did. Not in public, that is. He decided to keep mum and take his medicine.

I suppose I'm the only being on earth, besides one, that knows what caused that wreck. Even Bill himself doesn't know any more. Only one other person knows—and that person never needed an explanation.

(Johnson turned upon us a knowing smile.)

But eventually Bill explained it all to me—when he was in jail, waiting his trial for manslaughter. Lord, how he clung to me, all through it. Even more than to his wife. And she was devotion itself. Yes, I will say she was a devoted wife to him. All through that terrible time she was a devoted wife.

Pretty little dark-haired, dark-eyed woman she was. Wonderfully fresh coloring for a woman of her years—thirty-eight, I'd judge. Full of life and vigor. Rounded cheeks. A perfect little beauty. Bill adored her, and she adored him. But—

(Johnson tapped the cloth with the tips of his fingers, and slowly shook his head.)

There was something about her—something in the snap of her eye, in the turn of her jaw—that told me things. Told me things before Bill himself told them.

That little wife of his had a temper. I sensed that from her brisk manner, from the spirited toss of her head. She looked as if she had a bit of a tongue in her head. And I was right.

You know the type. You've seen it. Clever women. Often most intelligent. All the same, a little free with the tongue. It gets to be a habit with them. I truly believe they express their very love for a man by being a bit cruel to him. They measure his love, they test it, by seeing how much it will stand. They seek the extent of his love in the extent of his tolerance. But finally the nagging gets to be a habit. It becomes their sole language. They reach the point where they don't even know they're doing it. It isn't nasty nagging either, but just little taunts—what you might call teasing, raised to a higher degree. The husband of such a wife will let his hair grow a day or two too long. Any other woman would say:

"My dear, don't you think you're letting that handsome head of hair grow too long!"

The other kind, Bill's kind, will say instead:

"Well! I'm surprised that a man of your intelligence—of your pretended intelligence!—will let his hair make him look like a monkey!"

I'm not guessing that. Bill explained it to me. And both sorts of women mean the same thing. It's only the difference in speech.

Well, I caught a tang of that in Mrs. Bill the minute I saw her. Even before Bill felt constrained to tell me the whole story.

IV

THEY'D married young. And loved each other like mad. Especially when they lost the little year-old boy. And then later, when Bill got up in the Brotherhood and attained a little prominence. For a while it lasted. But gradually that prominence seemed to change things. It put notions into Mary's head. She got the idea that her husband was a deserving man. Deserved more rapid promotion. For himself, but also for her. You see, she herself had got the prominence bee in her bonnet. You know how it goes. There about her were other women, neighbors, wives of business men, "men not nearly so bright as Bill," other hus-

bands drawing big salaries, or making big money, and buying their wives diamonds, and furs, and autos, and handsome houses. While Mrs. Bill— You know how women rub such things into one another.

It began to get on Mary's nerves—waiting so long for Bill's promotion. So the tongue began. Little digs from Mary, about the long hair, about the slow promotions, about everything, big and little. The habit of teasing and taunting set in, you see.

Bill was a big, patient man, slow and good-natured. But finally the taunting began to get under his skin, and he took to answering back. He began to get even. It grew to be a kind of game to them. Each tried to see what could be said, and what answered back. And so at last they built up between them a recollection, an accumulation of sharp things said. Things not easily forgotten. Things that stuck in the mind, things that rankled, that came up time and again. Recriminations. It cooled their love. No—

(Johnson paused abruptly.)

No, I don't mean that. I think they loved each other as much as ever. But the love couldn't speak out. It was choked. The sharp words, the recollections always stood in the way. They loved, but their love was tongue-tied, you see. Each was always on guard, watching like a hawk for some hidden taunt to resent. They even misinterpreted innocent remarks from each other. Toward the end almost anything would serve to start a tiff.

Not that they quarreled incessantly. Sometimes the old fondness broke through, Bill told me; and it would seem as if the great cloud of misunderstanding had passed. But always the outside world would come breaking in upon Mary again. Mary feeling like a prisoner in her house, with never a chance to get out of it, while everybody else about them was forging ahead, and Billy only an engineer and Mary her own cook and housemaid. Then her temper would give way again. An inevitable word would escape her. And the war would be on again.

The last spat broke out at the breakfast-table on that momentous morning when Bill left the house for his regular run. Mary had let slip a little something about Bill's using his brains in such fiddling work. And Bill swung back with its being perfectly honest and honorable work, and a damned sight better than riding round in diamonds and furs and autos bought out of real estate swindles such as he knew about.

"Wait till my invention catches on. Then you'll have your diamonds and furs. And you'll have them honestly and fairly. With a little reputation to boot."

"Oh, yes! That precious invention again! I've heard of nothing but invention ever since we were married. A lot that invention has done for us, hasn't it!"

And so it was on—till Bill had to rush off to work, all broken-hearted, and wrought up, and angry clear through. Rushed off, that most dangerous of engineers, the man more feared by railroad managers than the drinker—the man with a domestic problem on his hands.

All day Bill couldn't get out of his mind that morning tiff. All day he was going over it, and thinking of the more telling rejoinders, the heavier jolts he might have handed back to Mary. All day he thought of the heavy jolts he was going to hand her when he got back home from his return trip next morning. Wondering why he hadn't a happy home, as other men seemed to have, with a fine boy tearing round all over the place.

And that's how the wreck occurred. That's where Bill's mind was when he passed the signals.

(Johnson poured himself a fresh cup of coffee. We kept silence, waiting for him to resume. Which he did.)

What hit that stalled local, you see, was not simply Bill Byrnes' Limited, but a train of circumstances. Curious, isn't it!

I suppose that night Mrs. Bill slept

as soundly as ever. But in the morning, when she read the papers—? Forty-nine people killed. The wreck of forty-nine homes in that collision. But in the fiftieth home also, where that lone woman sat and read, there must have been wreckage. She knew.

V

I WAS with Bill all through the trial, and before it. He wanted me by. By then he had ceased to be bitter. Least of all toward Mary. It's a great place for thinking, behind the bars; and I suppose Bill had thought things through by then, from beginning to end. Yes, I know he had thought them through. And understood 'em. It just struck him dumb, that's what it did, this monstrous punishment, monstrously unjust, laid upon him, for no offense that he was ready to admit. I don't mean the punishment by law. Bill courted that. Awaited it eagerly. As a means of squaring himself, in his own eyes, for what he had done. The punishment I mean, the punishment that Bill meant, was the vision of that wreck, of that little golden-haired girl, that was never going to pass from before his eyes.

The trial was short. For Bill there was little enough to say. The company got off scot-free. It was proved that the road, and the signals, and the equipment—everything except the failing brakes on the stalled local—and all the other factors, even Bill himself, had been in reasonable running order. Bill had ignored the signals. That was all.

I remember him on the stand. Till that moment everyone had pitied Bill in his agony of mind as he watched the proceedings. Pitied him on the stand, till, in the course of his ordeal, the lawyer asked one question:

"How did you come to pass those signals?"

The question was bound to come. For weeks Bill had been dreading it.

We newspaper fellows see many strange things; but in all my years of it I never saw anything to wring my withers as the sight of Bill Byrnes did then. He sat there in the witness chair with his hands hanging limply down between his knees and his eyes peering up helplessly from his bowed head. It seemed a full half minute that the court waited for his answer. The prosecuting attorney even repeated it for him, in a silly, dramatic manner.

And Bill answered it. "I—I can't say, sir."

"What! You don't know?" the lawyer roared.

Bill slowly nodded his head.

"Mental lapse of some sort, eh?"

"It—it must have been that."

I believe that even if it would have helped Bill to tell the truth, he wouldn't have told it. No man could. After all, Bill was a man.

VI

THAT ended the pity for Bill, of course.

Next day, and for days afterward, the papers were full of horrified editorials and letters from readers, condemning the railroad system, or the system of life, that could rest human lives upon uncertainty like that. What was amiss when trusted engineers could fail in that way?—the question thundered through the press. And so nobody felt very sympathetic toward Bill when he stood up for his sentence.

Nobody except one. Mary was there.

She rose to her feet when he did—as if she couldn't help it—as if she, too, were standing to accept sentence. It was one of those impulses straight out of the innermost self. She was still standing when they tapped his shoulder, to wake him from his daze, and lead him away. And I'll be a long time forgetting, too, the look they exchanged.

It was an appeal for forgiveness. It was a glance of total understanding. It was pity flying to meet pity. It was a collision of hearts.

For I know that Bill pitied Mary then. He saw it. He'd showed me that long before. Honest little woman at heart, she wasn't to blame. Where the blame rested was on the—the general

order of things. Bill would have called it Society if he had been one of us. But whatever you choose to call it, Bill understood.

It was this endless rush and competition of the time. This struggle of everybody, this grabbing after money and motors, this scuffle for position and power, no matter how it's got, and devil take the hindmost. Bill had felt the full tide of it beating against himself. No doubt every man feels it. The women it breaks first, dear sensitive creatures. It broke Mary. She toppled over against Bill. And so the pressure ran along till it found the inevitable weak spot. Found it in Bill's wandering wits on that fatal night.

And yet for a long time Society used up columns of the press in debate of the cause of that wreck!

The one relieving spot in the whole business is that Bill was left time to understand. Time to lift all the blame from Mary, and pity her. To this minute I pity her myself. She—she's the wreck. As for Bill, there's no need of pitying him. He's happy. He doesn't know. He—he's Abraham Lincoln.

KISSES

By Marion L. Bloom

THOSE tasting like an exquisite perfume.
Those suggesting a soaked sponge.
Those of my pet kitten.
Those of a dribbling baby.
Those of my wrinkled, bewhiskered grandpa.
Those utterly without meaning.
Those conveying odors of baked beans, coffee or ginger-bread.
Those of an artist that carried me to empyrean realms and let me fall with a bang.
And those of—Ah! There *is* a Heaven, after all!

WHEN a woman tells a man she loves him, she always has a reason. It may be that a bill will arrive the next day, it may be a new hat she wants, it may be another man.

WOMEN consider music beautiful in direct proportion to its resemblance to the Wedding March from Lohengrin.

NOISELESS kisses are really the only dangerous kind.

THEN—

By Karl W. Kessler

WITH a sigh the girl freed herself from the man's arms. His kisses still burned her lips. The man, abashed that in his passion he had resorted to brute strength, stood quite still.

How many times had he kissed her? How she must hate him! He felt rather sorry for her now. She was so frail, so utterly incapable of being other than the little unsophisticated maid.

. . . And she looked so forlorn, so pathetically tired.

He took her hand and pressed it gently.

"Dearest," he whispered, "forgive me."

The girl turned her head. Her lips moved but words failed to come.

Suddenly the man drew her to him.

"Then, if you won't forgive me," he muttered fiercely, "I'll kiss you again."

He smothered her face with kisses. When he drew back, the girl lay quite still in his arms; and, for a moment, he thought she had fainted.

Contrition seized him.

"Sweetheart, forgive me. . . . I was a fool—I didn't realize what I was doing," he cried desperately.

Still she was silent. Half in anger, half in despair, the man pushed her from him and started for the door.

Blindly he groped for the door-knob —and then the girl became articulate.

"Why, Jim, you're not going without kissing me good-night, are you?" she demanded almost tearfully.

MEETING

By Maxwell Bodenheim

A SHEPHERD edged against the sky,
And drawing its blueness into his reed,
Was your longing.
And I, the sky, swept up by his reed,
Felt the melting, light-flamed breath of him,
And tumbled out in sudden music.

ORCHIDS

By Thyra Samter Winslow

I

LELA MERRITT had never had any orchids. Before she had married Tom, he had given her, occasionally, bunches of violets. Once in a while the bunches of violets had pink rose buds or even gardenias in the heart of them, and came properly incased in glazed paper and a florist's box, accompanied by violet-headed pins, and delivered, pompously, by a florist's boy.

Usually, however, the violets were purchased from a street vender and were already slightly withered by the time Lela pinned them on her coat. Not that Lela was any the less grateful for them—she loved them, even the withered ones. But now there were housekeeping expenses—even a three-room apartment takes a lot of money—and clothes for two—all out of Tom's salary.

Lela had been so glad to exchange stenography for housekeeping that she hadn't thought of giving feminist arguments about why she should keep her position, so there wasn't even money left for street violets. Not that Lela cared. She was quite content and never even thought of the present dearth of violets and the total absence of orchids.

When Everett Henderson, aged fifty-seven, of Hollins, Virginia, came to New York, for a visit, Tom Merritt asked him to dinner, for Tom wanted him to meet Lela and eat a dinner that she prepared. Henderson was Tom Merritt's father's best friend, and, besides that, he knew everyone in Hollins. And as Tom had been raised in Hollins he was not averse to having Henderson meet his pretty little New York wife, to having him eat one of her dinners in the dainty little dining-room and then to having him go back to Hollins and tell about it.

On the way to the Merritt apartment, Henderson remembered that it was quite the thing, when going to a little informal dinner, to take a nosegay to the hostess. One always did that in Virginia. So Henderson stopped at the first florist shop. The very blonde young woman assured him that the nicest corsages just now were orchids—with a few valley lilies, if you like, or a few of anything you liked; but, really, just orchids were smarter. So Henderson, who had never bought orchids before, either, took a corsage bouquet of them, all stiffly wired, to Lela.

Lela liked Henderson and she liked the orchids, which she placed in the center of the dining table, in a vase that had been given to her for a wedding present by Miss Farmer, one of the stenographers at Grantly & Co., where Lela had worked before her marriage.

It was a very good little dinner, though it never would have pleased those who object to having dinner cooked and served by the same person, and that person the hostess, who also helped to eat it. It was the kind of a dinner that those who have just been graduated from no maid or one maid to regular servants would have objected to.

The three who ate the dinner liked it. Lela wore her new blue dress, with a little white frilled apron over it, to keep the spots off, and she used all of

her wedding present silver and her best table cloth and the new napkins with the big "M" in the corner that Tom's sister had sent her. There was a thin soup first—canned—and then a very nice roast, round and brown and tender, with browned potatoes, and a crisp salad and one of those fancy, creamy desserts that only brides of less than a year can ever make. And all through the dinner, Lela listened, quite fascinated, while Henderson told anecdotes of Tom's youth, about the time he saved the boy from drowning when he was twelve—Lela had already heard half a dozen versions of it but it was always good—about the funny pets he had had, about his fad for collecting things.

At ten o'clock Henderson shook hands heartily, told Tom and Lela what a fine time he had had, how much he liked their little home, promised to remember Tom to all of his old friends, to remember the messages Lela sent to those who had written to her, and said good-bye. Later that night he left for Hollis, Virginia. . . . But the orchids stayed.

II

After Henderson had gone and Lela had kissed Tom and told him what an old dear Henderson was and what a young dear he was, she remembered the orchids and put fresh water on them and examined them and wondered if she really liked them better than violets or roses and if she ought to stand them in a draft or out of a draft and if salt in the water really would help to keep them fresh. She had heard that refrigeration was good for flowers but she was rather afraid that putting them in the ice-box, between the butter and the cream bottle, wouldn't really help, so she left them standing on top of the ice-box and went to bed.

In the morning Lela looked at the orchids before she prepared breakfast. They were rather attractive-looking, she decided, though there were a lot of flowers she liked a great deal more. They hadn't withered so very much. She put them in the center of the table at breakfast and Tom admired them again and said he wished he could afford to bring her orchids, and she kissed him and said he was a dear and she'd rather have him, without orchids—or even geraniums—than any other man in the world with a world-full of orchids thrown in.

After Tom left, Lela cleaned up the little apartment, polishing the new furniture with special care. Everything was rather miniature sized, but who minded that?

Lela put the orchids on the table in the small living-room, wiping the bottom of the vase carefully, so that it wouldn't be damp and hurt the varnish. She looked at the orchids again. After all, she had never had any orchids. Why not put them on, and go out, some place? It seemed a shame to let them stand there and wither, with no one to see. Lela hadn't intended going any place, but there were always the shops and Fifth Avenue and lots to see. There were several little things she had to buy. She'd be real splurgy, on account of the orchids, and eat lunch down town, too, in one of the little places she knew about.

Lela's suit was quite nice looking. She put on her best waist—it was a lovely waist, the gift of her Aunt Ida, who gave nice things, when she gave anything at all. She'd been saving it for special occasions, but it wouldn't hurt it to wear one extra time, down town, and one has to have nice things to go with orchids.

Lela brushed her hair until it was glossy and smooth. She put on her best shoes and her good-looking little dark hat and then pinned on the orchids, adjusting them carefully. It seemed an awfully big bunch, bigger than she had imagined. They quite stuck out, massed, in front. She thought that the hall-boy paid a lot of attention to them. She felt quite overdressed and wedding-y as she went out.

Lela took a bus. She usually took

the Subway, but orchids don't seem at home on Subways and she didn't even think of a taxi, and, of course, she didn't have a car or the use of one.

Lela noticed several people looking at the orchids. She quite enjoyed it, though she did wish the bunch was a smaller one. It seemed growing in size since she put it on. Maybe people thought it was artificial. She hated artificial things!

At Fiftieth street Lela got out of the bus and started walking down Fifth Avenue. What a lovely day it was, just cool enough. How well-groomed she felt—no one else had on such lovely flowers!

She passed two girls she knew and stopped to talk with them. She hadn't seen either of them for some time. She saw them looking at the orchids. Wasn't it good that she had them on? It would show them that she wasn't such a poor little worm after all. She wouldn't explain how she got them, either. She'd sort of make believe that there was some mystery about them.

They talked about mutual acquaintances, clothes. Then:

"Aren't those orchids lovely and large," said the taller of the two girls, Mabel Winchell, who couldn't help but be curious out loud.

"Yes," said Lela, "they are rather nice ones."

"Your husband still at the honeymoon stage, I see," said Miss Coburt, who was curious, too.

"Oh, yes," said Lela, "of course he is, though these aren't from him."

She laughed a little.

They talked a few minutes longer and parted.

"Goodness," thought Lela, as she looked into a shop window, "weren't they the curious things? I'll tell Tom how they acted about the flowers. It's rather fun, having orchids."

Miss Winchell and Miss Coburt were talking about the flowers.

"And to think," Miss Coburt was saying, "that she's the girl who always acted so innocent about things. Orchids—like that! Do you know how much that bunch cost?"

"No, but I can imagine. And I know Tom Merritt's salary isn't so big, for Fred Flemming works where he does and he told me about it. It's funny she'd have the nerve to try to get away with a thing like that—so soon after being married. And her waist—did you notice it? You can't wear waists like that—on Tom Merritt's salary."

"Well," Miss Coburt told her, "I'm not one to gossip about people, but it does seem a shame, doesn't it, and she's always posed as such a good little thing. And she actually put it over me. I've got her number, I can tell you."

III

Down Fifth Avenue Lela walked, smiling at the sunshine and the shop-windows and the people. To her Fifth Avenue always seemed like a monstrous holiday, and now, with the orchids, she felt more a part of it and less just a watcher, as she usually felt. Perhaps people thought she was some one important—on account of the new waist and the orchids.

A few blocks farther on Lela met Arthur Morris. She had known him for a long time. Morris had a reputation as a great wit, made by pretended sophistication.

"Whither away, gay and festive lady?" Arthur inquired.

"I'm just shopping," Lela told him.

"And whence came the gorgeous blooms?"

Lela was rather glad she could impress Arthur Morris. She started to explain:

"They were given me by a friend of Mr. Merritt's, of Tom's, Mr.—"

It is hard to learn to speak of a husband as if he had always been a permanent thing to speak about.

"Ah, a gentleman in the case?" asked Morris, and he raised suspicious eyebrows.

"He is a friend of my husband's," said Lela.

"They always are," said Morris, "though they usually don't appear this early after marriage."

"I wish you would quit teasing," said Lela, "the flowers are from an old man I hardly know."

"Perhaps his age is one reason for them, and, as for hardly knowing him, surely he's trying to alter that. But you look very fine, lovely lady, and I don't blame your—husband's friend."

Lela left him. Of course he had only tried to be clever; but, anyhow, he certainly had been impressed by the flowers. He probably thought she was awfully popular.

When Arthur Morris tried to be clever, he usually believed things before he said them. Now, walking down the street, swinging his cane and trying to pretend that he was an idler out for a stroll instead of a draper's clerk hurrying back to work, he thought of Lela and smiled. Sly little thing—he hadn't thought it of her. An old man—orchids—he must be rich. Nor very discreet of her—bubbling it out. Still, if she wanted him to know—he'd have to investigate a little farther and see where it led. A bit interesting, what?

IV

In one of the big stores Lela looked at lingerie ribbons, pinkish-cream in color, almost white. Trying to decide between that and the usual "flesh-color," she looked up into the eyes of a woman she knew, an older woman whose husband was, in some way, connected with the business Tom was in. The woman smiled. Someone standing between them moved away and Mrs. Cannon and Lela stood side by side.

"A lovely morning for shopping, isn't it?" said Mrs. Cannon.

"Wonderful," said Lela, and picked out ribbons. "Aren't these pretty. I do like them."

"I suppose all young people do," smiled Mrs. Cannon. "They seem so fresh and young. Ribbons and flowers—" she smiled at those Lela wore.

"Yes," said Lela. She thought she ought to explain the orchids. They needed some explaining—for her position, she felt.

"These were given to me," she said.

Mrs. Cannon looked at them a little closer.

"Indeed," she said, "they are very lovely."

"Of course we can't afford things like these," said Lela, for she didn't want to let Mrs. Cannon think Tom spent money for things he couldn't afford.

"No," Mrs. Cannon answered, "there aren't many of us that can afford orchids these days."

She looked at Lela rather closely, at the new waist, the little, trim hat. She smiled again, rather vaguely, muttered something about being in a hurry and left.

Lela admired Mrs. Cannon. She did hope she hadn't said anything she shouldn't have said.

The clerk was waiting for her decision. She bought the ribbons.

V

On Fifth Avenue again, Lela walked happily along, admiring the frocks of the other women so much that she forgot to envy them. It was good to be young and on Fifth Avenue and well dressed!

Lunch time. Usually Lela patronized an inexpensive little candy shop, where dainty, though not exceedingly filling sandwiches were sold for almost the price she could afford. Today Lela longed for something a little grander, something nearer orchids. There was a tea-room just off Fifth Avenue that Lela was always hearing about. It was quite near the office where she used to work, and often, after the lunch hour, the girls at the office used to joke about having had lunch at the Purple Teapot.

Usually, Lela would not have felt dressed up enough to have ventured in, but now, with the orchids, she thought she'd try it, just for fun. She had al-

ways wanted to eat there. She had a little money left over. She wouldn't have to order a great deal, just a sandwich or a salad and tea, perhaps. It couldn't cost such an awful lot.

The Purple Teapot was attractive. Lela liked it a great deal. She could tell Tom all about it—he didn't like lunch places like this. The walls were a pale, creamy yellow, the curtains a dull purple, the chairs blue-green, with little knobs of black. Lela was so glad she had come, though it didn't make her dissatisfied, for she was quite content with her own little home and Tom just across the table, at meal times. If things only kept on going nicely . . .

The prices were high—but this one time Lela had just decided on lettuce sandwiches when someone spoke to her. It was Warren Grantly, the head of Grantly & Co., and Lela's old boss. Lela had always been a little afraid of him.

"Miss Em—I mean, Mrs. Merritt," he said, and he looked at the orchids, "I wonder if you'll let me share your table with you? You weren't waiting for anyone?"

"No, indeed," said Lela. "I was just going to order. Sit down, won't you?"

Lela had noticed the glances of others in the tea room, coolly appraising and she had felt that her new waist—she had opened her coat—and the orchids—had satisfied them as to her fitness for Purple Teapot luxury. Now, Grantly must have accepted her as "belonging," too. She knew that Grantly knew some of the men in Tom's office. She hoped he didn't think it funny because she was in the Purple Teapot.

Lela tried to explain the orchids, carelessly. But, of course, it isn't easy to explain things you aren't asked about. But, of course, tea rooms and one bunch of orchids didn't mean anything to a man like Grantly. He was rich and probably thought that all women wore orchids.

Lela knew that Grantly would pay for her luncheon and she was quite elated over it. Luncheon with her old boss! She had always admired him but had never talked to him very much. She didn't know exactly what to say, even now.

Grantly asked after Tom, whom he hardly knew, and told some office news—there was a new man in Shaddock's place and a new file girl did rather laughable things.

A curious, personal note crept into the conversation. Lela guessed it was because she was married—no doubt that's the way men you used to know spoke to you after you were married. And maybe Grantly felt that he knew her better than she had felt that she knew him, for of course, he had seen her every day. He was quite good-looking and she knew that he was very popular. Lela felt it was really quite a compliment for him to eat lunch with her.

Finally luncheon was over.

"Come into the office sometime," Grantly said; "we're all interested in you. Or, better still, 'phone me and we'll run over here for a bite to eat. You're still one of my girls, you know. I insist on keeping an eye on you."

Grantly had always been just The Boss to Lela. Of course, she couldn't ring him up and ask him to have lunch with her—but, wasn't it nice of him to think of it? Of course, she had intended visiting the office—it had always been rather pleasant there.

Lela thanked Grantly for the luncheon, but when he said he'd ring her up and ask her out to lunch "to talk over old times," she knew he just said it to be pleasant.

She told him good-bye in front of the tea-shop and again walked down Fifth Avenue.

"To think of little Lela turning out like that," muttered Grantly, as he walked away. "But you can't tell. Meek as a dove around the office for years, frightened if a man looked at her—and now, married just a few months, sporting orchids given her by a 'friend of the family' and eating at the Purple Teapot. It's a shame to see a boy like Merritt fooled that way."

And, on the opposite side of the street, Miss Farmer and another Grant-

ly & Co. stenographer, also coming from lunch, stopped in amazement.

"Did you see that?" asked Miss Ross.

"Could I miss it?" asked Miss Farmer. "Did you ever—Lela Merritt, who wouldn't say boo to a goose. She always did smile rather friendly at Grantly. And you know his reputation when it comes to women. But—luncheon at the Purple Teapot and orchids—oh, my!"

"It is pretty bad, isn't it," said Miss Ross. "You can't tell how long a thing like that has been going on nor how far it's gone. She certainly pulled a good bluff at the office about being in love with Merritt. I'm pretty wise about things usually—but this time she put it over me."

"Those meek ones always do," agreed Miss Farmer.

VI

LELA decided she would run into Tom's office and say "Hello" to him. He'd probably be back from lunch and she'd stay just a minute, not long enough to take his mind from his work.

In the outer office, she noticed the glances that were sent after her. She was glad she was looking well. She didn't hear the whispers of the clerks and stenographers. Perhaps it was just as well.

Tom hadn't returned from lunch.

"He was with another man," the office boy told her, "and he may not be back right away."

Lela didn't wait. There hadn't been anything special she wanted to see Tom about anyhow, and she'd see him in a few hours, at dinnertime.

On the way out, Lela passed Clifton, who was at the head of Tom's department.

Clifton spoke, politely. He was a busy man and didn't pay much attention to the wives of the men on his staff. But, after he had passed, he remembered that Lela had worn a huge bunch of orchids and rather elaborate-looking clothes—and he knew Merritt's salary to the penny—and orchids couldn't be purchased out of it, even to the exclusion of food and the few other things that are considered necessities. He promised himself to look closer into Merritt's work. He prided himself on his keen intuition. Now he told himself that he had never quite trusted Merritt from the first. At any rate, he'd bear looking into.

Lela walked over to Fifth Avenue again. She looked into the shops and bought some little things that she needed. Then she met Pearl Hamlin. Pearl, usually, didn't pay much attention to Lela. Pearl was the sort of girl who always did exciting things—to whom things were always happening, who had just spent the evening or was just about to spend the evening with some mysterious young man who had a millionaire for a father.

Today, Pearl invited Lela to "have a drink" in the tea room of a nearby hotel. Lela accepted eagerly, for she had always wanted to go to a fashionable tea room at tea time and it had never occurred to her that she might go alone.

The tea room was gaudily decorated. Pearl ordered a high-ball. Lela ordered tea and Pearl laughed at her for it. Perhaps a dozen couples were dancing, the usual collection of thin, adolescent painted girls, fat, idle women, sleek-haired, sharp-faced young men.

Pearl knew one of the professional dancers, hired to entertain the women who craved masculine attention and could get it only by purchasing drinks in garish tea rooms. She smiled and waved welcoming fingers at him, and at the end of the dance, he came to their table, accompanied by a blond twin, who differed only in cravat and eyebrows.

The two couples danced. Lela was a good dancer. She and Tom danced quite a lot, in the evening, to the Victrola. As she danced, she didn't notice that Casper Winkler, whose daughter and son-in-law she and Tom admired a great deal and wanted to know better, came in, accompanied by friends

from out of town, to whom he was showing "the wasteful side of New York" and took a nearby table.

Lela was quite satisfied now. She had wanted to dance in a hotel at tea-time and now she had done it. So, after the one dance, she said good-by and explained that she had to hurry home to prepare dinner. She had had an awfully pleasant time!

VII

LELA did hurry home. Left-overs from a company dinner may be made into a very good dinner for two, quite resembling the illustrations in the frontispiece of the cook-book, but it takes a lot of time to do it.

Lela reached home, slipped out of her suit and her new waist and into a crisp pink gingham. She unpinned the orchids, stuck the two pins with the orchid-colored heads into a cushion on her dressing table and tossed the orchids into a waste basket.

She started getting dinner, cook-book propped open on the table, cutting left-over roast beef into cubes, humming to herself and thinking over the events of the day as she worked.

It had been fun. But it was over—and there were so many things she wished she had done. There was a man whom she hadn't seen in ages, whom she would have liked to have looked up—just dropped in at his office. She had never felt quite well-groomed enough before to have done it, and of course she wanted to look nice so he'd think she had "married well" and all that. And then, there were so many restaurants she wished she'd eaten in. If only she had chosen the Beaux Arts instead! She'd always wanted to eat there! Of course, she couldn't afford it—but—why, Grantly had paid for her lunch today—she still had that money. But without orchids—and the orchids were dead!

But were they?

Lela went back to the waste basket and picked them out, tenderly. A few of them had wilted rather badly, but she was the sort who could wear flowers a long time—they wither right up on some people—and a few of them were still bravely holding up their lavender heads.

Lela slowly unwrapped the tinfoil which she had carefully put back on them in the morning. She threw away the orchids which were too badly faded to be revived. The bunch looked smaller, but it had been such a big bunch. After all, one or two fresh orchids couldn't be so dreadfully expensive, and, by adding just a few new ones to the bunch they'd look fine for another day. Wearing them, there were so many things . . .

Lela set the table carefully, neatly, poured cool water into the vase Miss Farmer had given her, put the orchids back into it, and then went back into the kitchen to finish preparing dinner.

A WIFE believes her husband's story according to the length of it. Thus she believes him when he begins.

A HAPPY marriage is boredom raised to a point where it becomes an art.

THE PERFECT LOVER

By June Gibson

HE rescued me from drowning.

He wrote me poetry and told me that my throat was as smooth as the petal of a valley-lily and that my form was as slender as a shaft of moonlight.

Every day he sent me orchids.

He would dance with no one but me.

Once when my puppy hurt his foot he carried him ten miles in the scorching heat.

He risked his life to bring me a string of pearls I admired.

When I sent him from me he would smile and come again.

He yielded to my every wish and would not argue with me. . . .

Within a week I was bored to distraction.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"I am your Ideal of a Perfect Lover," he said.

THE PINE TREE OF DUSK

By Grace Hazard Conkling

THE pine is a pagoda
With star-encrusted eaves:
The pendent cones are bells of bronze
Low-voiced like April leaves.

The roof of smoky beryl
With planets deep inlaid,
The beams of amber shadow-wrought,
The walls of dusky jade,

These make a secret temple
Unentered save of wings,
Wherefrom an incense drifts to heaven,
Wherein a veery sings.

Not mine for rest and worship
That never-trodden floor,
But I may lay my marigold
Before the temple door.

THE TENTATIVE DEMISE OF MY FRIEND CREIGHTON

By Bliss Cutler

A THREE PART STORY—PART I.

I

IT was my friend Creighton who, over the telephone on a bleak Fall night, started what proved to be a more or less irreparable injury to the smug content with which I was living my life. It was an altogether normal and rational life, appointed according to some stern and exalted precepts of duty and conscience, and upon the whole quite satisfying to myself.

My practice had grown steadily in a highly respectable fashion. My clientage was of the staid and remunerative sort that has to do at the outset with the aiding grief-stricken widows to select suitable monuments, and thereafter endeavoring to keep them from buying sixty horse-power automobiles and steam yachts before I could get their late spouses' estates finally probated. I generally managed to compromise with them on a season or two in California, occasionally having to throw in the Riviera and Monte Carlo.

Having acquired much skill in such matters I was wont to flatter myself that I was something of a judge of women. In time I came to learn that I had been but a prayer-rug before the altar of their newly awakened desires. They had kneeled on me, some had even sat upon me most impiously,—while their faces were turned always toward the shrine, more often in thankfulness, I fancied, than in grief or penitence. Much of this probating business is prone to make of a man something of a cynic—if not a confirmed misogamist. He is apt to acquire the habit of meditating more than is good for him upon the relative economic values of the married and unmarried man.

I had come to believe that the former gradually ceased to be a human being and became a beast of burden, with his eyes upon the ground, with a constricted horizon and an obliterated zenith. The more he violated the eight-hour law, the less of use he became as a man, and the less independent he made his wife and progeny,—which is not good for them if the race is to be evoluted with any degree of speed.

So I had come to have little use for the married man, and to consider him about as uninteresting as the mule,—and to be admired for about the same qualities. And whatever his wife may have been as a consort, I seldom found it in my heart to blame his widow.

The telephone rang the second time.

"Hello, that you, Laughton?" it shouted at me.

I admitted it.

"This is Creighton, Harrison Creighton. Can you come over to my apartments? It is important, and I may have to keep you up rather late, so you had better come prepared to stay all night."

That is the way it started, and although I was perfectly comfortable in a chair that fitted me, and entirely contented with a book that appealed to me, I answered, "All right," in brief assent,—whereupon this man Creighton hung up the 'phone.

The hanging up of a 'phone always possesses for me a touch of the fatalistic. It cuts off all further dispute and protests, like the clip of the shears of Atropos.

I had known Creighton at the club for several years, but only in a desultory way. We occasionally played dominoes together of an evening, principally because we found our skill at the game about evenly matched, and he had several times taken me to his rooms afterwards. He being a bachelor, by courtesy of the law, and I by choice, we had some things in common,—the affinity of the self-governed with the customary contempt for the monarchial.

I was ushered in by his valet and found Creighton clad in a smoking jacket and standing with his back to the fireplace. I could but note, with that pleasure I take in all things properly conceived and put together, his well built figure and handsome face.

It was a refined face, yet rather strong in lines and jaw, which gave it at times an engaging virility,—a suggestion of latent though untried force. His eyes and the little wrinkles about them could stiffen into a sternness that was dominating, or soften to a gentleness and frankness which must have been alluring to women, if not on occasions a bit disconcerting. Tonight they had an almost angelic expression of serenity.

"Have a seat," was his brief greeting. "Peter will give us something."

"Quite the best we have," he cautioned Peter. "No, choose it yourself," he interrupted Peter's mild inquiry, "We have a fancy tonight for the flavor of the unexpected."

And that is what I got—not a flavor merely, but the very essence. I do not remember what it was that Peter brought. It was strong to the first taste, but it purred in the throat and warmed the heart with a pleasant glow of fitness.

When Peter had retired, Creighton lighted a cigar and resumed his place before the fire.

For a time he appeared to be musing, while I sat back in the cushions and watched the smoke curl lazily upward from my own havana.

"Laughton," he said at last, "I have sent for you to make you my confidant, in a sense, my—executor."

I had heard words like this before. They were the forerunners of the granite shafts and of new exercises in tact with widows. I therefore assumed my stock expression of polite, but not too eager, concern. I hoped that my countenance at such times exhibited just the right touch of deprecation.

From chance remarks made regarding him I had gathered that Creighton was a man of some independent means, with an income to keep him in reasonable luxury even in a large city, but I had never contemplated him as an *ex post facto* client. I knew that he dabbled at times in story writing, and that publishers for some reason or other had seen fit to favor him in their magazines, but knowing an author more or less in private life dulls the sense of that homage accorded him by the less, or more favored, as the case may be. So it was perhaps that I had never thought of him in the guise of the ancestor of an estate to be probated.

The words "being of sound and disposing mind and not acting through fraud or—" were already running through my mind, when his continued silence suggested that I might be expected to make some reply.

"You have no direct heirs," I started—

"Heirs," he repeated vaguely. "Heirs! Oh, yes; heirs. Yes, five of them."

"Five," I echoed, dumbfounded.

"More or less."

"Oh, I was not aware," I replied, not knowing whether I was expected to express condolence or felicitation. "You had never mentioned—having a family, you know."

"No," he admitted, reflecting, "I believe I never did."

He had not struck me as being over

thirty-eight, hardly more than thirty-two. I wondered how he had managed to keep so youthful.

"Are they girls or boys," I ventured.

"Girls," he answered, solemnly.

"None of age, I take it," shifting a bit uneasily in my chair.

"Of age?"

"Yes."

"I should say they were." And then he thoughtfully added, "Gertrude is thirty-one."

I leaned forward and took a few more swallows of the best in the cellar —Peter's choice.

"Oh, a sister," I suggested, rallying.

"Gertrude? No, she would not stand for that," he smiled grimly and added, "it was Mary who proposed to be a sister, but she is out of this."

I regretted that I had taken the few swallows so soon. I needed them more now, but did not just like to reach out for more so abruptly.

And then it suddenly struck me that I had at last got on the right trail, and I observed casually,

"So there are likely to be complications."

"There are complications all right," Creighton said, "but they are in here," putting his hands over his chest, "not outside."

The man who smokes a cigar always has, when at loss one advantage over the one who does not. He can always gain time by slowly and nonchalantly knocking the ash from his cigar. I was doing this now, when Creighton took his from his lips, and at last turned on the limelight.

"They are not children of mine,—at least not of my blood, even if they are of my fancy. They are girls, women, women who believe that I am in love with them, with each of them,—each one believes it."

So it was not a will to be drawn,—but just a way of his. I had not caught the significance of his gesture, and I said with complacency, "A breach of promise affair."

I even smiled indulgently,—to indicate how easily such matters may be handled by an astute attorney possessed of an unabridged knowledge of women.

"Nothing like that," he retorted, smiling with equal indulgence. "They are not that kind. I choose with better discrimination."

"And why does each of the five think that you are in love with her?"

I remember now that I said it easily, as though it was a matter of no very great importance.

"Oh! I fancy that I have told her so, at one time or another."

Creighton said it with such a matter-of-fact voice, and with such apparent unconcern, that I this time reached over and drained my glass. I felt that he could not properly be offended after that, at my abruptness in the expression of my emotions.

Although I had not found women particularly necessary in the economy of my life, I was indifferently tolerant of the love affairs of others. I had assumed that gentlemen generally confined themselves to one, at least at a time, excepting where they went wild and doubled, to the ultimate profit of my profession. It was always a little difficult to get a man to admit to more than one, even to his attorney, but *five*, and *Creighton*. . . .

"You seem to be taking it a bit hard," he observed, "but it is not as bad as you think, *quite*."

He flicked the ash off his cigar behind him into the fire. "I may as well out with it. I have brought you into it, and I may as well trust to your—well, at least your saving—though I hope your unexpressed—sense of humor. If you were a happily married man I would never be able to explain it to you. You would not understand. But being a bachelor, and having no preconceived knowledge or understanding of women, your mind is open and susceptible to impressions, and—"

"Thanks," I interrupted, testily.

"You need not get huffy about it." He smiled amiably. "It may be a compliment,—for aught you know."

"Very well, go on with it," and I glanced at the tall clock in the corner.

"Oh, we will not be through until the milk wagons amble by. Take another bracer."

"Later," I answered, laconically.

"Very well. You may need it more then."

He turned partly from me and rested his elbow against the shelf of the fireplace. "You may know that Cordelia and I separated some eight years ago. There was nothing against her,—nor me, for that matter,—just incompatibility,—temperamental and apparently irradicable. She took life—and me, seriously, and I took her—and life, rather frivolously, a bit too much so, no doubt; and we bored each other to the extinction of every possibility of ever being anything to each other or to ourselves." Creighton was thoughtful for a few moments.

"She is married again," he went on, "and is now in the gay set in Washington, and I—I am so serious the most of the time, that I bore myself worse now than I ever bored her. I did not give her much—of myself,—not so very much. She did not seem to care for it,—at least she did not drag it forth. But Cordelia is out of this. She is happy."

He faced me with a grim smile faintly twisting his lips, and added:

"But I am not."

There is no need for expressing sympathy for a man's domestic complications, when he himself takes them so frankly, and as for his present unhappiness, it served him right for being a fool enough to expect,—after having had one experience,—to get anything but unhappiness out of five additional complications. So I ventured no comment.

"I have knocked about the world a good deal since then, and have met a lot of people,—women."

He concluded abruptly and restored his cigar to his lips and smoked away quietly for a time, apparently oblivious of my presence.

I knew Creighton, as I may before have intimated, as a most engaging fellow, popular with men, a good player and a good loser,—a clean cut, live man of the world. I had caught an occasional rumor that indicated that he was something of a favorite at certain balls and week-ends and house-parties of the more or less socially elect, but never a rumor that connected his name with that of any woman, nor that suggested any particular fondness on his part for women.

And now he was confessing to love affairs with at least five, not counting Mary, who had offered to be a sister to him, and who did not count.

The more I contemplated it the more mentally disconcerting it became, and I glanced covetously toward the cut-glass decanter on the table. But though Creighton's back was partially toward me, I refrained. He was getting something from the mantel shelf.

And then he handed me a photograph, in a heavy silver frame.

"This is Gertrude," he said succinctly—and resumed his place on the hearth rug.

II

I HELD the frame so that the reflection on the glass did not interfere with the vision, and studied it thoughtfully, as I was doubtless expected to do, and yet not without a growing interest quite on my own account.

It was a full-length figure, posed with her back toward the observer,—the figure of a gracefully proportioned woman standing with her face partly turned over her left shoulder in a singularly sweet and refined profile. The drapery of her simple evening gown showed white in the picture, and was arranged in what I afterwards came to know as the Callot manner, caught slightly above the waist by a pearl heart of exquisite design, and displaying a lovely back and neck, and a beautifully rounded arm.

"Rather stunning, don't you think?" was Creighton's comment.

"Something more than that," I replied, not at all as a connoisseur, but as an appreciative human being.

As a rule, women as women do not

interest me, but here there was something very soft and alluring about the neck and shoulders, and something very feminine and thoroughbred in the arrangement of the hair and in the poise of the head, and something as well very enchanting in the contour of face and lips.

"Thirty, and not married," I observed under my breath.

"She was," replied Creighton. "She has been abroad for the past three years, mostly in Italy. Her husband,—nice sort of a fellow in a way,—went to the dogs, or South America and died there,—with the dogs or the Argentinos, I never knew which. He was not very decent to her, and her experience with married life was not encouraging."

I continued to study the picture, while Creighton turned about and stood gazing into the fire. I could not conceive how any man could help being decent to a woman like that, even though he might not particularly love her. And though I did not indulge in that sort of thing myself, I could quite understand how one, disposed toward the art or business of love, might easily worship such a woman.

"And you told her," I said at last, "that you loved her, and she—?"

Creighton aroused himself, with a bit of a sigh I thought.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I told her five years ago—after her husband left. He has been dead three years now, and she has not, well—answered my question, yet. But she has not married—yet."

I looked up at him, and my eyes swept from his face over his splendidly proportioned figure,—aristocratic, if that is the word,—in a smoking jacket tailored like a dinner coat.

"A splendid pair they would make," was my irresistible mental comment, thinking aesthetically—not maritally.

I never did pretend to construct happiness for others by any synthetic process.

My forte was to diagnose the case afterwards.

"We correspond," Creighton was continuing, "and I write her the most ardently aggressive letters. She is a good correspondent, but she ignores my ardent parts with a skill which knocks out my conceit all right enough, and still manages somehow to leave my pride unhurt. She never claims the spoils, nor flaunts the palm of victory."

"A rare woman, indeed," I commented, in heart-felt approval.

"A rare woman, in many ways," he repeated gravely.

His back was toward me and I could not see his face, but I fancied that this tone carried something more than mere conviction.

"Probably she thinks that if you really cared, you would go to her and tell her so in person," I suggested, though with a taste of bromide on my palate.

"Perhaps, if I did, it might not—" he paused.

"Why not?" I pursued.

I was already unconsciously arraying myself as the lady's champion to enter full into the lists—a misogamist bearing a lance decked with a ribbon. But there was a something about that—

"At times," Creighton was saying, "when I get a letter from her I call in Peter and send for the sailing schedules."

I leaned back in my chair and surveyed the end of my cigar. And why not? Obviously Creighton was a marrying man, and if such was his religion,—let him be consistent. I never challenge a man's religion, simply because it is not my own, nor any believer if he is honest in his belief. Gertrude appealed to me as being a very desirable fetish,—if one must have such things.

"Peter has been with me a long time," he continued, "and he somehow manages to consume two days in the packing, and by that time—"

He turned abruptly, and took from the wall at the side of the fireplace an old gold frame, evidently of foreign design.

"That is Denise," he declared, fairly thrusting it into my hands.

III

It was a master-piece of the photographer's art, resembling a portrait done in black and white, with soft shadows for a background,—a side view of a lithe, passionate figure leaning slightly forward, supplemented by a wealth of dark hair under a modish toque of spreading velvet folds. Her coat, also of velvet, was of that rich simplicity of cut possible only to the master modiste, the open lapels displaying a vest of white lace that ended in a close-fitting collar which flared from her slim neck to her very chin. It was a nervous, high-tensioned body, controlled by slender muscles of enduring vivacity,—one, I fancied, that could twine about a man like the Cassytha vine about a tall forest oak.

Her eyes were dark, quick, intense eyes, and I imagined that they must be beautiful. There was nothing of the oriental voluptuousness of passion here, but on the contrary its clean aggressive intensity.

Creighton stood at the side of my chair, looking down at the picture. There was a glow of admiration in his face when I glanced up at him inquiringly.

"Fascinating, is she not?" he said, almost boyishly.

I turned back to the photograph.

That there was indeed a bewildering fascination about her, done even in black and white, I could not deny.

I admitted it somewhat reluctantly, for it must be remembered that I had but just yielded fealty to Gertrude, and had entered the lists as her true and loyal knight.

"I met her at an Ambassador's ball several years ago," he explained. "She had friends at the French embassy."

He moved over and dropped into the chair at the front of the table, and was silent for a space,—while I conjured up visions of Denise in action, and the moving picture was very compelling.

"And so," I broke in upon his musings at last, "you told her that you loved her."

I did not deem it at all doubtful, but he did not answer at once, and when he did it was in reminiscence.

"She is a marvelous dancer. We danced together at the Mardi Gras Ball at New Orleans that year. She took the men by storm. With Denise you do not dance—with your feet on the floor. You just float with her through the air,—and off somewhere—is the music. You appear to be doing your own walking down the dining room, but you know that she is really carrying you along with her. She never sits down,—she is one moment beside the chair, and then—she is in it,—leaning toward you, while her long gloves are slipping off as if by magic. You do not even ask what she will have to eat. There are never more than two or three things on the menu that seem appropriate, and somehow you know just what they are without asking."

"Why has she never married?" I inquired, looking again at the photograph.

Somehow one felt quite certain that she had not.

But Creighton again ignored my question.

"She gives a zest of life—" he was saying.

He had leaned forward with his elbows on his knees, and his hands clasped lightly together.

"—makes it the leading stock on the exchange, and you go to studying the market reports to see what you can get out of it."

"An incentive," I suggested, though somewhat doubtfully, as it did not seem quite the word.

"No," he debated, "hardly that. Rather an incitement, a spur. She never gives you time to get bored. You have rather to keep grooming yourself to keep up. But her caress! Laughton—It leaves you weak and gasping,—not because of any intention on her part, but just from the magnetism of her touch. She is just frankly intense and thrilling. She never indulges in any of the little coquetries,—never puts her face to yours and drops

her eyelashes,—she just kisses you and the touch of her lips stays with you for days,—you know what I mean."

He looked at me a bit uncertain I fancied.

"Yes," I confessed readily, with the blasé accent of the man of the world.

I do not know why it is that a man who does not care for the sex, never quite likes to have other men believe that he has had no experience.

Besides I had experienced the half-closed lashes—with several widows. They were connected in my memories with those humiliating moments when I had at last decided to give in to them.

"And you told her that you loved her," I persisted.

"Of course!"

He apparently regarded it as a superfluous question.

"But she does not respond to your—?" It was crude even though he was making a confidant of me.

I was yielding to a growing desire to know what a woman of Denise's type would do under such circumstances,—particularly with a man of Creighton's type. It afforded a pleasant psychological diversion, I told myself.

"Oh, she responded all right enough, in her way," he retorted. "She has told me a hundred times that she loves me better than any man on earth. She *writes* as much, quite freely, puts it down on paper, man."

I reached over and took another cigar. There was a small Greek lamp, of unique design, lighted on the table beside me, but I did not use it. This did not seem the occasion for anything suggestive of marble baths, and flowing draperies, and slaves bearing incense. Denise evidently did not belong to such mysteries.

"What is the answer?" I asked, tossing the flickering match into the fire.

"That is what I am wondering, myself."

He had arisen and was pacing up and down before the hearth, and his words and the tone of his voice was such that I glanced up in surprise.

"The fact is that I have never really asked her," he explained.

"You see, when I have been with her, she never gave me the chance to put it in the right way, even if I had dared to risk her—her refusal. I have cared a great deal for Denise," he added soberly. "And when I am alone here—" he paused beside a small table on the far side of the mantel.

"Another case of Peter's packing," I ventured.

He did not reply, but came slowly back from the table.

I noticed that the lines above his brow had cleared, and that there was a fresh gleam in his eyes.

He held something in his hand, and I stacked some books on the table beside me and stood the frame that held Denise beside that of Gertrude.

"That is Claire," was his only reply to my question, as he relinquished the frame to me.

IV

He took his glass from the tray and holding it to the light filled it to the brim. I could quite understand his feeling the need of something of this sort,—after a period with Denise. I even felt it a bit myself,—at least a need of the bracing flavor of the stinging air of the open fields. I could imagine that with Denise one had to be constantly in form. Your trainer put you through the paces, shower-bathed you, rubbed you down, and sent you into the game with Denise, and you expected him to be standing by with sponges and towels when you returned for breath. I could fancy that it might be quite worth it all,—treading the mazes with Denise,—but—.

And there was Claire, a splendidly shaped girl, in a polo costume of covert cloth. She wore a sleeveless coat, cut in a sort of paddock style and skirted like a three-button Prince Albert, and close-fitting breeches of the same material disappearing into a pair of masculine riding boots. The sleeves of her linen shirt were rolled to above the elbows, leaving her forearms bare save

for the short gloves, and she held the ends of a riding crop crossed behind her hips. A white stock and a white polo helmet completed her costume.

Her figure was neither slender nor full, but was so perfectly proportioned and so appealed to my sense of the pleasure in the fitness of things, that it was some moments before I turned to studying the face. There was a most agreeable trimness of waist line above the bell-shaped skirt of the coat and a shapeliness of the knees which showed above the polished-boot tops.

But the face was as perfect in contour as her figure,—a mobile mouth and chin, and straightforward eyes.

"Well," I observed, without taking mine from the picture.

"That is the habit she wore at the polo tournament where I first met her, several years ago," Creighton explained.

"Since then I have poloed and tennissed and golfed with her more or less every Summer and Fall. Her mother is dead and her father seems to believe in me after a fashion. He considers me rather harmless, on the whole I fancy. At any rate, last year Claire and I motored through England and the Continent, with her aunt as a chaperone."

"I am not sure but that I might envy you," I said with guarded enthusiasm. There was something strong and serene about Claire. As a counter to Denise she could undoubtedly hold her side of the scale in balance.

"She is the most agreeable outdoor companion I ever trailed about with," pursued Creighton, putting down his empty glass, "never rushed, never perturbed,—always adapts herself to conditions comfortably and without a murmur. Her walk, Laughton, is worth getting acquainted with,—a long easy stride, supple, and not too mannish, you know,—just the pliant grace of Atlanta."

"She has rather a fine figure," I admitted, in the contemplative tone of a connoisseur.

"You should see her on horseback," he warmed up. "She is perfect. She has a hand that is slender and strong—as soft and white as her complexion—and its very touch would make a bucking broncho kneel down for her to mount."

I took a look at her face again. It was not mannish in any respect. Neither, for that matter, was her pose, in spite of her costume.

"Everything she does," he was saying, "she does easily and surely—right to the center of the bull's-eye. I do not believe that she ever topped a golf ball in her life."

He had been pacing the floor again, but now he halted before me. "She seldom smiles—but when she does! Why, I once saw a traffic policeman wave her automobile over a dozen lengths of fire-hose and straight through the fire zone of a burning building,—just for that smile of hers."

Knowing something of the New York street patrol I was bound to admit that there might be something in Claire's smile.

"Oh, yes," Creighton interrupted my impulse, "I have told her that I loved her,—told her up in the Adirondacks, at Palm Beach, on the porches of three country clubs, in the White Mountains, twice in Switzerland and about six times on as many golf links."

He turned away with a shrug and resumed his striding.

"And you never told her," I murmured thoughtfully, "in New York or Paris,—never in any ball-rooms, or in the conservatory behind the palms, with the music of the waltz in your brain."

"No," came from Creighton, over in the corner by the writing desk, "I proposed to her on horse-back."

"I fancied as much," I murmured again.

"It was the last ride we had together, five o'clock one morning,—somewhere in the Berkshire Hills. She said that if I—I think that she said that if I should happen to remember or had sense enough to renew the proposition at eleven o'clock some evening a year

hence, that she might consider it—seriously."

"Ah! And the year?"

"Oh, hang it," he retorted testily, coming back from the writing desk. "The year was up four or five months ago," and he placed another frame on the table at my side.

It was a folding affair, made of pigskin, such as one sees grouped with traveling outfits in a Cross window. It struck me as I took it up that it had not always stood on a table. The edges of the leather showed wear.

"And who is she?" I asked at length, under my breath, after a dozen minutes had passed.

Creighton, seated deep in the other chair, had been as seemingly absorbed in his reveries,—as I had been in the face before me in the pigskin frame.

He looked up suddenly.

"You have never seen her picture before?"

His surprise was genuine.

"I could not have done so," I retorted bluntly, "for if I had I should never have forgotten it."

This was a particularly girlish figure, slightly above the medium height of women, I judged,—garbed in an afternoon gown,—a loose wrap of the prevailing mode, open at the neck and fastened at the waist line by a large button or two. The trimmings were of fur, and some animal skin was thrown negligently across her shoulders. Her hat was a rather broad affair with a low crown and long feather, and was worn low on one side. One hand held the skirt of her wrap close about her, which displayed a pair of slender ankles and broad shoes with broad buckles,—altogether a charmingly feminine posture. But it was her face, the expression of her eyes and mouth which held and riveted the attention.

Though I have seen them many times since that evening, and have studied them at close range for hours together with the photograph before me, I do not know how to describe them,—to convey the impression they gave. I might say that they were rich, mellow eyes, with a mingled touch of sadness and gentle humor. It was not that she herself was sad, but—their expression is indescribable by my pen at least, as likewise are her lips, lips faintly luscious in their outline, but wearing that same little touch of wistfulness as her eyes.

The pose of her body was delicately yielding, warming to the heart and arms, and the soft contour of her neck drew one to nestle, yet—when your glance met her eyes you knew somehow that the pathway to all that sweetness and charm lay through the soul of her.

"And who is she," I repeated.

"She is an artist," replied Creighton gravely, "already of some international fame. To me she is simply—Eleanor."

V

He arose from the chair as he spoke and resumed his position on the hearth.

"I knew her first some years ago, before she had made good in her art. She is known here mostly for her miniatures of millionaires' wives and daughters, and abroad for those of the crowned heads, though she has had a number of hangings of her larger work in the Paris Salon. I used to think that she was the most perfectly adorable woman the Creator ever formed in human shape and inspired with a soul. You yearn for her—but somehow you never put your arms about her. You would rather kiss her lips than any one on earth,—but you never do—that way."

"What way?" I wondered.

I was not an adept at this sort of thing, though I could quite understand how one might have a desire to kiss those lips.

I did not say so to Creighton, however.

"She kisses me—whenever she happens to feel like it, which is not often—and leaves my whole being aglow with a delicious—well, a delicious feeling of peace and buoyancy, a sort of permeating and refreshing wine."

"What did she say when you told

her that you loved her?" I asked abruptly.

"She did not say anything. It was up in her studio,—one night after a late supper. She does this sort of thing once in a while with me, after the theater perhaps, or the opera. It is not an oriental setting—exactly, but there are divans, and thick rugs under foot, and soft lights, and she more often in some flimsy negligée when we are alone, corsetless and pliant."

Creighton paused.

"I told her once," he interpolated, "that I believed she would let me hold her robe for her when she emerged from the bath, so little did she ever seem to mind my presence, and she,—she only smiled that odd little teasing smile of hers and observed that it might not be quite impossible, though rather improbable."

"And you?" I questioned, as he did not go on.

"I," he retorted in self-anger, "I only sat there and glowered into the fire and said nothing. I should have either spanked her then and there for a spoiled child, or have carried her off bodily, and married her whether she liked it or not."

Either act would have been so at variance with my own ideas of the proper treatment of a lady by a gentleman, that I preferred to pass this little digression of Creighton's without comment.

"You were speaking of the time you proposed to her," I prompted.

"We were sitting by the little supper table in a corner of the studio, under a hanging bronze lamp. After I told it all to her, she arose and walked slowly over to a little unfinished canvas on an easel in the corner of the room, and stood there for several minutes, looking down at it. Then she came slowly back and from behind me put her arms about my neck, and raised my lips to hers and kissed them."

I waited several minutes for him to proceed, but he seemed to consider the incident closed. He had so far taken me into his confidence, however, that I felt that I might venture to satisfy a legitimate curiosity.

"And then—?" I suggested.

He looked up perplexed.

"*What* then?"

"That was what I was asking."

"Oh, yes. I was thinking of something else. But that was all. You see—I have known Eleanor for a long time. She was not ready to say 'yes' and she did not want to hurt my feelings by saying 'no.' She knew that I would understand."

In thinking of this since, I have tried to convince myself that there was lacking in Creighton at least, a real intensity of emotion, or that there was an over-refinement of delicacy shown on both sides. I would have been satisfied with nothing short of a definitely worded answer, and most women would have given it, and the explanation with it, if the answer was not favorable to the suitor.

Yet I take it that the process of evolution must be going on in matters of the emotions,—of the sentiments, of refinements of understanding, quite as much as in the physical development of mankind. The cave man was accustomed to express himself with a cudgel physically applied, if those wise in such matters are to be believed, and I take it that he would consider my methods of conveying my meanings, for instance, as puerile and totally inadequate. It is not for me to say that Creighton and Eleanor are not perhaps but a little more advanced in the matter of sensitiveness of understanding.

I knocked the ash from my cigar, doing it very carefully, so that it would drop just in the center of the tray at my elbow.

"And you have never—asked her since?" I questioned.

"No," he replied.

He seemed to be searching the inmost mysteries of their relationship, probing for something that he could not find.

"I have sometimes thought . . . ," he hesitated.

"Oh, hell! What is the use?

Eleanor does not love me—in the way I wanted her to love me. She has her art, with a big 'A.' She told me of her own accord, a while ago, standing behind me with her arms about my neck,—she always stands behind me when she does this sort of thing, while I have to sit and can only drink in the perfume of her,—that she loves me as much as she does any man. But that is just it. She does not love any man in the world—enough to marry him. Why, to her I am just a companion, a sense of security,—a perfectly innocuous member of my sex, just a man whom she loves better perhaps than any man on earth, that is all," he concluded, with a touch of bitter irony.

He reached over for his glass, and tossed it off with a fling of the wrist.

"You will probably see her this winter," he said, setting down the glass again.

"I?"

"Yes. She will be in the city for several months. She is engaged on some miniatures of the *nouveau riche*, and making them pay for them. She calls them 'pot-boilers.' "

I wanted to study the face again, and so I endeavored to prolong the conversation, even with banalities.

"It must be very trying work," I said.

"In a way, I suppose. But she works hard while she is at it, and makes it up in playing all the harder when she plays. She is always in fear of getting stout."

"Stout?" I echoed. The very suggestion was a heresy.

"Yes. She rolls for it."

"Rolls for what?"

I glanced up in complete bewilderment.

"Rolls on the floor, morning and night. Lies on her back and tries to kick a little Chinese god dangling from the electric fixtures—without moving her arms, by raising up on her hips and elbows. I took her to a fake museum several years ago,—she likes to knock about with me in odd corners,—and showed her the fat woman, and she has been qualifying for a contortionist ever since. She walks a dozen miles more or less every day, rain or shine."

"She has slender ankles," I commented, looking down at the picture.

"They all have," replied Creighton, "and slender wrists. With me it is a sign of breeding. The other type does not appeal to me."

"Ah!" I breathed.

There might be something in that, although I had not thought of it before.

Creighton appeared to have some very well-defined ideas of what appealed to him and he did not, I should judge, bother much with the other sort. He was sitting back in his chair now, with a reminiscent expression on his countenance.

I did not interrupt, hoping for some more descriptions of Eleanor.

In a few minutes he said,

"You ought to see Eleanor in a bathing suit. She is the most deliciously feminine thing that ever came out of the surf."

I thought of Aphrodite on that pleasant morning on the beach off the Isle of Cyprus. Possibly the Olympian gods had nothing on some of us mortals after all. And it may as well be understood at this juncture, that although I admitted to being a misogamist, as we are sometimes wont to be called in derision,—the word has a derisive sound, which is why our friends like so much to mouth it,—I am not inappreciative of the beautiful in nature, or that which is clever and charming in the feminine mind.

I admire from the depths of my æsthetic being the Venus de Milo, and others of her form at the Metropolitan, and I appreciate the usefulness of the base-burner,—but that is no reason why I should be tied to either for life.

But Creighton was still gently smiling at his reveries of Eleanor.

"Does she swim as well as Gertrude?" I asked casually, for no definite reason that I knew of, save perhaps to keep the conversation moving.

"Gertrude. She does not swim, that

I know of. I could not fancy her in a bathing suit,—somehow," he added, reflecting.

But my question had evidently opened up a new line of visualizing, for he presently went on,

"Denise,—I could not imagine her in a bathing suit either. Gertrude belongs to the drawing-room. She is an accomplished musician on the piano and the harp. She is of the charming and gracious sort, and her forte is as hostess and I fancy in a home. You might press your lips to her shoulders, but you would never souse them with salt water. You assist her to alight from her limousine, but you would never duck her in the surf. She would be 'blue-ribbons' for an ambassador's wife," he added.

I knew that Creighton had been mentioned for a rather important post abroad, and I wondered whether—.

"And Denise belongs to the ballroom and the theater," he was saying, "and to the supper party afterwards at the Ritz,—and the golden bubbles that rise in the glass. She always lands on the front seat of a coaching party, and is always invited into the governor's box at the Horse Show."

"And Claire?" I prompted.

"Oh, Claire never goes into the surf. She is a good oarsman and pulls a single shell on the lakes, though I doubt if she even knows how to swim. If she is not handling the ribbons herself on the box of a four-in-hand, she is driving a tandem at the front. It is a revelation to see her handle a horse," he concluded with a note of pride.

After a moment he continued rather gravely, a different measure in his voice, perhaps a sadder one,—I could not be sure.

"Claire is a good sport, but she cannot handle a rifle, and she never would have dived off a row boat into the waters of Lake Winnipeg, at six in the morning,—clad like a Lady Godiva, as her husband told me that Kathleen did on their wedding trip. The water is a bit cold in Lake Winnipeg in September. I have tried it."

"Kathleen?"

He tossed his half-burned cigar into the fire and took a fresh one from the humidor.

"That is Kathleen's photograph," he motioned with the Grecian bronze lighter, "on the table there at your shoulder—with the back toward you."

VI

I AM to admit that it was with something of a sigh that I relinquished Eleanor, placing her on the table in line with Gertrude and Denise and Claire.

I reached over and took up the frame he indicated. It was a double affair, of beaten silver work, and held two photographs—obviously of the same person.

The one was of an almost Madonna type of face, with large liquid eyes looking slightly upward,—half parted lips and a small nose and chin, surrounded by a wealth of glorious wavy hair. The other was a bust view of the girl, clad in a short sleeved, tunic style of waist, with her bare arms clasped behind her head. It was the same face, but in this one the eyes were smiling most provocatively, and there was the tantalizing suggestion of a dimple at the left of the laughing lips.

"She has beautiful eyes,—and hair," I murmured, involuntarily smiling back at the face in the frame.

"They are marvelous eyes and hair," agreed Creighton soberly. "Her eyes are a tawny, golden brown,—the soft deep eyes of an amorous tiger, though in that respect they belie her temperament. And her hair is a light, golden bronze and ripples in natural waves. Her father was Irish and her mother a French woman, and she has the quick Irish wit with the impulsive shoulders and gestures of her mother's race. And she can get out of her bed of a morning, turn on and off the shower, twist that hair of hers into a golden halo, and in twenty minutes appear at the breakfast table as immaculate and wholesome as most women under the gas light after two hours with their maids."

I was not personally acquainted with the time limits of any lady's morning toilet accomplishments, but I assumed that Creighton meant to include a drapery or two in the list of activities. At any rate, I could understand that to do so much in so brief a period, she would have to have a marvelous complexion and a perfect digestive organ. And in any event, that smile would be likely to make even a cynic and a misanthrope believe anything possible of Kathleen. I voiced aloud some such sentiments.

"Her complexion goes with her eyes and hair,—a firm, white, melodious skin, with the faint tints of the rising sun underneath. Did you ever see the inside of a conchshell and note the tints—just where the white runs into the pink? That is it."

Creighton was exhibiting more liveliness of spirit on a sudden than he had any time before during the evening. He touched a button under the table's top, and a door opened behind us.

"Peter, take away this Pfaffenberg," he commanded impatiently. "We are not in a mood for Rhine wine. Bring us a bottle of Chambertin,—red. We want red wine. The photographs are cold," he added to me, as Peter passed out with the tray.

VII

I AM quite aware that in describing Creighton's array of women, as pictured before me, I have continuously indulged in superlatives. But it is not a poverty of adjectives, nor the enthusiasm of the uninitiated, that is to be blamed. It must be admitted that Creighton possessed a very discriminating taste, and that he was in a position, both on account of his financial independence and because of his own personal charm, to choose his friends much according to his fancy. I could imagine quite readily that certain enduring qualities enabled him to keep them as such. However all of this may be, I am simply dealing in facts, with no necessity fortunately for indulging in fancies.

After Peter had again set out the glasses, and had departed as noiselessly as he had come, and I had partially drained mine, I took up Kathleen's picture again.

"And so this is the fifth,—and the last,—and she has a husband," I observed by way of renewing the subject, for her face, or the wine, or something or other had put me in the mood to hear more about Kathleen.

"She had," he said, with emphasis on the verb. "We were interested together in a lumber deal up in Canada, and we hunted big game on the far shores of the Winnipeg one Fall. The next, he had seen and married Kathleen, and he took her up with him on a sort of honeymoon trip. It was a crime."

He got up and went to pacing the floor again.

"How a crime?" I asked.

"A crime," he turned upon me, "that a perfect honeymoon like that one, and with—with *Kathleen*, should have been wasted on a man like Gregg. Why, she is the one woman in the world with whom a perfect thing like that could be pulled off,—a honeymoon, man! Just the *two*, off from the world together in those wonderful Canadian woods,—getting to know a warm, pulsating girl like Kathleen, who can handle a rifle like a Canadian guide and dive into the Winnipeg—the glint of her hair vying with the rising sun, and with that shell-like skin, and those laughing eyes, and the odd little twist of the lips, and that provoking dimple. My God, man—."

He sprang to his feet and paced the floor with savage tread.

"Such a thing can never happen again," he went on angrily, "for it could only happen with a girl like Kathleen, and there is none just like her, and no one could ever do it with her again, for Gregg has taken the 'edge' off for good and all."

When the fierceness of his resentment had somewhat abated, I ventured to ask what had become of Gregg.

"He got to drinking too much around the clubs, got on the wrong side of the market, and then gathered up what he could get his hands on and turned up in Tokio with a Canadian-French actress, and six weeks later her lover trailed in and filled Gregg full of lead. Gregg's father went on and brought back the body, and settled a comfortable income on Kathleen for life. She has her mother with her now, and drives about the city in an electric, when she is not traveling abroad."

He stopped at the table and reached for the frame. His countenance softened as he looked from one face to the other.

"These were taken some years ago," he said, handing back the frame, "before she was married. I knew her long before Gregg did. She is the woman I have known the longest of all now living. We grew up together. She is not so madonna-like, nor alternately so laughing now as she was then. Her experience has jolted her down some."

"Why was it that you did not marry her, instead of Gregg?" I asked abruptly.

He hesitated a moment before answering and then, soberly,

"I do not know."

I glanced up in surprise at the change in his tone. He was thinking deeply, pondering it over in his mind.

"I suppose for one thing that I never really asked her. We had so grown up together that I no doubt believed that all women were like her, and that she was nothing out of the ordinary. A surpassing environment in youth may have its disadvantages after all. It makes one inappreciative. And too, when we were youngsters she used to say that she was going to marry me sometime, and I came to take it for granted,—until Gregg got her."

"And since Gregg died?" I persisted.

"Oh, I started in to propose to her, last Fall, after I had gotten back from doing the Continent with Claire."

"Started in—?"

"Yes. But when I had gotten as far as telling her that I had loved her all my life, she—"

He broke off and laughed outright.

"The recollection seems to amuse you," I observed dryly.

I had years ago, in the heyday of youth and quite, inexperienced dreams, always considered proposing marriage to a woman as a very serious and unlaughable affair,—one to be long contemplated with inward misgivings as to personal worth,—a sort of solemn avowal before the throne of divinity. True, I had since come to look upon it as the quite unnecessary subjection by a free man to a life term in a penitentiary. Either view of the subject was serious enough, and not to be considered lightly.

But Creighton had turned upon me angrily.

"It was not so damned amusing as you think. She put her arms, if you must know, about my neck and stopped my words with her kisses, and said, 'Of course you have, dear, and you love me now,—and you ought to, a lot,—for I have been just a little nicer to you than I ever was to—to any man.' And the more I tried to tell her, the more she agreed with me and kissed me, until I lost my temper and took my hat and left,—she stood in the doorway, laughing and waving me a farewell. And the next morning she and her mother had left for Algeria or Hindoostan, or some other remote place where the natives chuck Roman letters and Morse codes into the mouths of their idols as votive offerings. Hindoos and Hottentots,—and the white man's hope,—they all look alike to her. She is not afraid of any of them."

His seriousness and disgust, combined with the picture he had drawn of Kathleen at their last interview, brought a smile to my lips, which I only suppressed by recourse to my half emptied glass.

Creighton picked up his and standing back upon the hearth rug, held it to the light. He slowly turned it about so that the oleous bead of the liquor formed films on the inner surface.

Then with an abrupt movement he set it back on the tray untasted.

"And that is but an instance," he broke forth, "of the whole damned thing. There is something wrong with me, or with them, each of them, or with the whole business of love and marriage."

"You are right on the last proposition," I responded promptly. "There always has been something the matter with the whole business of love and marriage. I have known that for a long time."

"You have?" retorted Creighton, with unnecessary asperity. "What do you know about it?"

"I at least know enough to keep out of it."

I had some very rational and impregnable views on this subject. It was one in which I was much at home. But aside from this it struck me that Creighton's protest was rather extraordinary. To be loved more or less by five such women as those arranged before me on the table would be generally considered a matter of envious felicitation. I said as much.

"Oh, they all *love* me," he admitted, but with a vein of bitterness. "They love me, all right enough. They would do almost anything in reason for me. Why, when I was laid up with pneumonia, three years ago, Kathleen dragged her mother up here and they nursed me for six weeks,—gave up their winter in Florida too. And Denise, down in New Orleans, the time I knocked down some petty official or other for insulting a flower girl, and they incarcerated me in their old bastile under more bail than I had with me, Denise heard of it and sent me her rings to pawn to make up the difference."

"Rather decent of her," I exclaimed.

"Decent! That was not all. When she found that I would not make use of the rings, she left a supper party and drove to the magistrate's at two in the morning, and wheedled him into dismissing the charge by telling him about the rings, and that she and I were to have been married in the morning, but that I would never marry her now with a criminal charge hanging over me."

His cigar had gone out and he stopped to light it, while I involuntarily shied a glance at Denise in the gold frame of foreign design.

"You may have heard," he went on again impatiently, "that I cleaned up a tidy sum in that Lackawanna deal a couple of years ago. Well, that was due to Claire. She happened to overhear old Harrington talking about the pool, down at Palm Beach, and she got a notion that the information might be useful to me, and the next day she sauntered into my office and asked me to invite her to luncheon. When I cleaned up a couple of months afterwards I tried to make her take half, but she would not touch a cent. She said she wanted an excuse anyway to come to New York for some new golf putter. . . . That motor trip," he smiled grimly, "with her aunt, was the only compromise she would make."

"And Eleanor,—bless her dear heart,—several years ago got wind somehow that I was dabbling in stocks and was on the wrong side of the market, and she sent for me and laid her check book in my hand. She had made out a number of checks to me, but left them blank as to the amounts. She said that she had only about three thousand in the bank, but that in the morning that she would sell some bonds she had in the safety deposit box,—and that she had some pot-boiler contracts which would keep her going for a year. Think of that! The money and bonds were all that she had in the world."

Creighton walked over to the table and picked up Eleanor's photograph. He held it to the light for some minutes, and I knew somehow that his eyes were moist.

"And Gertrude," I suggested at last, partly to relieve the strain, and partly because I felt that she was the kind who would stack up with the others on a "show down," as some of the club members would put it.

Creighton placed Eleanor's frame

back on the table and backed to his accustomed place before the fire.

"Gertrude," he said gravely, "has never quite forgiven me for that matter of the embassy. She used to have all sorts of ambitions about me, and put through that appointment to Vienna. She thinks that I was born for that sort of thing. When I found out how it all came about, I promptly resigned."

"Why?" I exclaimed in wonder.

Creighton was certainly cut out for the diplomatic service. He spoke half a dozen languages, I knew, and had seemed remarkably well posted on foreign affairs. He had a rare faculty for making friends if he cared to exercise it, and a mind keen and sensitive to impressions.

"I could not accept a thing like that," he exclaimed, "at the hands of a woman, even from Gertrude. Besides I did not care particularly for that sort of thing then, though I have sometimes regretted it since. If that Assistant Secretary at Washington had not given it all away to me, in an excess of devotion to Gertrude, I suppose I would now be slaving myself in the country's service."

I looked Creighton over with renewed interest,—standing there on the rug, smoking all too complacently for a man with whom five such loyal and charming women were in love, and I again voiced some such sentiment aloud.

"In love with me?" he repeated with rising impatience. "They are not in love with me. That is just the trouble."

"What do you call it then?" I retorted.

To a mere layman like myself the evidence amounted to proof.

"Oh, they love me. They make no secret about that. I wish they did. It would be more assuring. But they are not *in love* with me. They will not marry me."

"Great gods!" I ejaculated. "Do you want to run a harem?"

"Harem! No!"

"What are you, a polygamist?" To a misogamist—a polygamist is beyond belief.

"No!" angrily. "I do not want a harem and I am not a polygamist. I want to marry only one of them—*one*. and one only. Not five or two, man,—just *one*. Do you understand?"

"Which one?" I managed to ask, after his sudden vehemence had somewhat subsided.

"Now you have hit it at last. Which one? That is just it. I do not know."

And then after a moment's consideration, "I suppose—the one who—wants *me*—the most."

VIII

This, I was bound to admit, was a problem of some proportions. It opened up a new line of mental foray into the esoteric mysteries of the most mysterious of the species. And this particular pursuit was right in my side line.

"There is a screw loose about me somewhere, Laughton," Creighton was saying. "Take Gregg, for instance. I could put it all over him in sheer intelligence, even in the show of breeding, if that sort of thing counts. As a man on the other side of a business deal, there are a hundred men in our club who could have handled him with hardly an effort. This is not vanity, or conceit. It is cold-blooded verihood. He was not clean-cut either mentally or in physique,—not even in his sense of the decency of things. And yet Kathleen chose him. *Kathleen*, one of the keenest, most level-headed women I ever knew. There is nothing weak," he challenged, "about a girl who can dive into Lake Winnipeg in September, for the mere sport of it."

Though I was familiar with the surf only between Maine and Cape Hatteras in Summer, and a somewhat tempered bath-shower in Winter, I could find no ground for argument on the score of Kathleen's mental and physical vigor. But on the general perverseness of the sex in following logical lines of behavior I felt myself competent to expatiate.

"Your own qualifications," I declared, "as against Gregg's, and Kathleen's superiority as a woman, have nothing to do with it."

I spoke with assurance, and in a tone which I deemed suggestive of scientific finality.

"What do *you* know about it?" ejaculated Creighton.

"I know a great deal," I affirmed coldly, "about women."

"The devil you do!" This from Creighton.

I was too much annoyed for the moment to reply.

He walked over to the table and filled my glass to the brim with Chambertin.

"Here, brace up, old man," he said gently, handing it to me. "Have a stiffener. You are dragging your cables."

I accepted the glass, but more as a tender of an apology than as a stiffener, while Creighton stood by regarding me thoughtfully.

"You may know women," he observed, as he cut off the end of a fresh cigar, "but if you do, you do not know it. You do not get it through the ultimate in reasoning,—and mighty little through experience."

"Possibly," I answered doggedly.

"It is a gift of the gods—" he went on, ignoring my rising resentment, "though they generally demand a man's life in exchange. Most men have to die for it, and thus acquire it only after it is of no use to them."

"That may be true,—of most men," I agreed, with a truculent emphasis on the superlative.

Creighton was back on the hearth rug again, and had planted his feet firmly on the floor. He took a few contemplative puffs on his cigar, blowing the rings ceilingward.

Then he looked straight at me.

"I propose," he said, "to die for it,—and put one over on the gods by making use of it afterwards."

"Suicide?" I suggested with polite sarcasm.

"Nothing so crude as that," he retorted. "Just plain demise. A perfectly good accident."

"Accident?"

"Man overboard."

Something in Creighton's expression and in the solemn tones of his voice knocked the rancor clean out of me, and I sat up very suddenly.

"What are you talking about? What nonsense is this?" I demanded.

"No nonsense about it at all. I am simply going to find out how I really stand with Gertrude and the others. And the only way I can find out with absolute certainty is to die for it. And this is where *you* come in."

"I?"

"Yes, you. That is why I have gotten you over here, and why I have told you all about them, and what they have said to me. Do you imagine for one moment that I would tell you all that I have without a superlatively good reason?"

"Well, I will not do it," I exclaimed. "I will not be a party to any such crazy, insane proposition."

"Oh, yes, you will," he replied smiling, "I have picked you out after much thought. You will do it, in the first place, to keep me from getting into worse hands,—and you will do it," he grinned discourteously, "because you will find here a great chance to help along your favorite study—your study of women."

I glanced impatiently at the clock. It was already midnight, and I made a movement to rise from my chair.

"Oh, keep your seat," Creighton said.

He said it with no apparent concern that I would actually go, and this nettled me the more. "You will hear me out, and then if you will have noth- of it, Peter will call a taxi for you."

IX

I SETTLED back in the cushions with a show of impatient resignation. After all I could in decency hear him out. A remark that Creighton had made earlier in the evening flashed to my mind. It was with regard to my meeting Eleanor. It might be interesting to probe the mystery of those eyes.

And then Creighton unfolded the most astounding scheme I had ever

listened to from the lips of a sane man,—a man eligible to a dozen of the best clubs, and week-ends and house parties without number.

The way he worked it out made it in the end seem less reprehensible than it did at first, and the cleverness of the details and the arguments he had ever ready on his lips blinded me to the consequences.

It promised, for me at least, some interesting adventure into the realm of erotic research. I even persuaded myself that it might have the value of a scientific experiment.

The plan, as regards his untimely demise, was commonplace enough, and simple. Creighton proposed to go abroad,—a trip on the Mediterranean, —with Peter.

"You will not need Peter here, will you?" he asked with a touch of concern for my welfare.

"Peter.—*Here?*"

"Yes. I have arranged for you to come here at once and occupy this apartment with me, and then you will stay here until I come back. You know,—I own it. I purchased it when the building was erected. There is a care-taker—an elderly woman, a very decent and motherly creature—who will keep the place in shape for you, if you do not care to keep a man."

It happened too that the proposal came most providentially, for I was obliged to move shortly from my present rooms on account of alterations in the building.

The thought of being able to drop into Creighton's comfortable apartment without the annoyance of hunting new quarters, and with no more effort than sending over my luggage, was certainly inviting. And also I had envied Creighton his library, and the prospect of a year amid the luxury of such a choice of books at my elbow was very tempting.

So Creighton and Peter were to be on a Mediterranean boat, and one evening, just at dusk, there would be a cry of "man overboard," and Creighton would be swimming with long easy strokes toward land, with a bundle of old clothes strapped to his head. He was, it seemed, an expert long distance swimmer.

And Peter would communicate to various people and places the loss of his master, and the details of the long fruitless search for his body, and cables would bring the sad news to me, his friend and solicitor, and to the papers, and to the trust company with which he did business.

"I have made my will," he explained, "in case of accident, and have named you as my executor, and I will leave detailed instructions, which you and I will prepare, for the trust company. In case any attempt is made to probate my will within the year, against my instructions to the trust company, its custodian, you will know how to stave it off."

"But what if Peter should skip out with the funds? He will presumably have to keep them while you are swimming ashore." I suggested. "You will have to take considerable money with you. You will not be able to use a letter of credit."

"I have the matter all thought out," he replied quickly. It happens that several years ago I acquired a plantation, or ranch,—a stock farm perhaps they call it,—down on the Chesapeake. I have never even seen it. It was rented to a fellow named Slade, and the lease expires the first of the year. Old Broughton owned it. You may remember him at the club. He went broke and I took it off his hands, to help him out. I will lease it for a couple of years, stock and all, to John Clayborn, *myself*, you know, and will arrange to have the trust company send him down five hundred a month for certain fertilizing he is to put on the land, as specified in the lease. I will have more than enough money, in a pouch of oil silk strapped about me, to get me there, and Peter will have some funds with him also."

"And you and Peter—?"

"—will come back by way of New Orleans, and enter upon our lease about

the first of the year. It is as easy as tobogganing in Montreal in December."

"Easy?" I suddenly woke up. "Easy for *you*. But what about my part of the deal?"

"All *you* have to do," he assured me pleasantly, "is to occupy the premises, receive the cablegrams, be interviewed, condole with the sorrowful and grief-stricken, and mail the obituary notices to the addresses on the list I shall leave with you,—and incidentally wear crepe on your arm and eat broiled mushrooms and caviar. They are the proper mourning food."

"The deuce I will," I retorted.

"Oh, well," he replied with a grim smile, "we will omit the crepe, and as an offset you can write the club obituary. Incidentally also, you will probably be written to or interviewed by Gertrude, and Denise, and Claire, and Eleanor, and Kathleen, and you will keep a diary which I have already purchased for you."

"A diary. Not on your life." I protested with vehemence.

"No, on my death," Creighton rejoined lightly. "Here it is."

And he took a book out of the table drawer and tossed it over to me. It was about the size of the stock register of an amalgamated steel company.

"What am I to do with this?" I asked in amazement.

"You are to put down, verbatim, the conversation which each of the five may have with you regarding myself, both alive and dead, with exhaustive notations covering evidences of their grief, and likewise your own impressions as regards its quality."

"Well, I will not do it," I declared. "You are mad."

"I am doing all this—this demise business, to find out how much they really care, am I not?"

"It is slowly insinuating itself into my mind that you have some such motive in your diseased brain," was my sarcastic rejoinder.

"How am I going to get the facts," he insisted, unperturbed by my irony, "unless I have the conversations and your notes to go by?"

"I consider it all very unfair to them, —even indecent," I still expostulated.

"I have given them some good times, during my life—maybe they owe me that much," was his brief dismissal of that subject.

"I have prepared a few sentences," he continued, "which I shall want you to see properly inserted in some one of the newspaper notices,—the ones which you will mail, blue penciled, to the addresses which I will leave with you. They mention casually that deceased's old friend and confidant, Stanley J. Laughton, who is also named as executor in his will, was interviewed in the deceased's former apartments, which Mr. Laughton was occupying during the former's contemplated year abroad, etc., etc. Thus you will be properly identified, and they will either write you or call upon you."

And he smiled in contemplation of the thing.

"If they neither write nor call, you do not expect me to look them up, do you?" I asked, with such tone of disapproval of the idea as my conscience would permit.

Somehow the notion did not strike me as unfavorably as it should a confirmed misogamist. There were Gertrude, and Eleanor, and even Kathleen. Claire was rather formidable, as I was not given to outdoor sports, and was no horseman. And Denise was clearly beyond the reach of my quiet and methodical habits of life.

"Oh, you will hear from them. They will naturally have some little curiosity, if not solicitude, regarding the ultimate disposition of the letters they have written me. They will quite properly not wish them to fall into the hands of strangers, you know."

"And if they want them back?"

"You will give them to them, *sealed*. They are all done up in little packages, properly labeled, in a drawer of my writing desk to which I will give you the key."

Creighton had evidently thought of everything.

"Only," he added, "just see that you give the right package to the right person. Otherwise there might be—"

"I should think it quite likely," I interrupted dryly.

For a time we were both silent, each no doubt reviewing in our minds the possible situations and complications. It is a serious matter to contemplate a projected demise, in the being or in the presence of the demisor. There is something a bit uncanny in discussing the event in advance.

"There is one thing more that has occurred to me," I said at length. "How am I to be sure that you are really alive, and not at the bottom of the Mediterranean? Something might happen in reality,—and then too you are depending on Peter, and something might happen to him."

"I have thought of that," he interrupted quickly.

He went to the door back of us and looked down the hall.

Then he crossed to his desk and came back with a small object which he handed to me. It was a little cross of tarnished silver, with an odd scroll design worked upon its face.

"I am going to wear this about my neck," he explained, "when I leave here. I shall have the cross soldered to a chain, and the ends of the chain soldered together. Should I drown, and my body be found, this little trinket is not of sufficient value to invite theft. And besides there is a general superstition, particularly among the Italians, against taking a cross from a body. If I die it will lie at the bottom of the sea or be buried with me. If I get through all right and arrive on my Chesapeake plantation, I will send it to you."

"Yet someone else *might* take it off and send it to me." It was by no means an impossible contingency.

Creighton was thoughtful for a brief moment.

"I have it," he said, as though some sudden thought had suggested it to him. "You see that the edges are smooth now?"

I nodded.

"If I send it to you, I will file two little 'v' shaped cuts on the edge of the lower shank. You will know by those marks that it was sent by me."

X

It was simple enough, and seemingly as safe.

I looked again at the little silver cross, to impress its shape and design upon my mind. There were some queer markings on the lower side that struck me as having some secret meaning. I held it closer to the light in the effort to decipher them, when Creighton reached out for it.

"There is a story connected with it," he said, turning it over in his fingers.

From the motion of his hand I fancied that his impulse was to carry it to his lips, but instead, with a shrug of the shoulders, he thrust it into his waistcoat pocket.

"Little cuts, like those I will make, were to be a signal between us. If I sent it to her, with the cuts on, she was to wait for me. She would know that I would soon go to her. But I never sent it. It was long ago."

He poured out some wine and drank it quickly.

It was on my lips to ask about the story, but his mood deterred me, and the matter slipped from my mind. Had I pursued it at the time, affairs might not have turned out as they did. It is often on such slender threads—mere impulses withheld—that our destinies sometimes hang.

So far as I knew then it was just a trinket. But it had a story,—a something which had attached to the little cross, a something which, though as vaporous perhaps as a thought, was once a real, a concrete thing. But had it gone after all, I have since wondered, —though it had seemingly passed long before? And that which then was, and which gave it the story, could never be annulled or destroyed, or be as though

it had never been, but must go on and on forever. For such is life. Nothing that has once been, even though it be but a thought, an impulse, can ever be recalled, but must go on and on through infinite space, making great or small circles, until perhaps it impinges on something or other that may get in its way, and then it must give something of itself,—a mere thrust, perhaps, but a something to that other against which it impinges. And that impulse, or thrust or whatever it was, must itself go on and on, making its circles, large or small, until it itself impinges and contributes its iota to the shaping of events.

I did not then know, much less did Creighton, that that which made up the story which went with the little cross, was to impinge on two lives and alter the course of still another,—that the story was not yet finished.

It was very late in the night, and Creighton shortly afterwards showed me through the apartment. There were two master bed-chambers, the one which Creighton used opening only out of the large room which we had been occupying. The other bed chamber was back of Creighton's, but reached only through the private hall. Each had separate bathrooms, with commodious tubs and showers, which it seemed was a hobby with him.

Back of the two bed chambers, and opening from the private hall, were the dining-room and kitchen and across from them the store-rooms and Peter's sleeping room. They were all large, particularly for an apartment, and furnished with some degree of elegance, and in Creighton's very excellent taste. I could, barring the influx of the opposite sex, look forward to a most pleasant twelve months so far as material comforts went, but I was still somewhat dubious of the entire scheme and the part I was to play, when Creighton cinched the matter with his good-night speech.

"You will do this for me, Old Man, and see me through,—above all you will not let anyone, not a soul—no matter what the provocation—know I am alive, until I show up here of my own accord. And you will never let it be known that this affair was planned out in advance? You can fancy that I would not care to be considered a damned fool, and an object for derisive laughter," he explained, "as I would if the truth were known."

XI

Of course I promised,—swore to it most solemnly with the clasp of the hands at parting for the night. In this country it amounts to a sort of oath, which gentlemen are supposed never to break. And I kept my word to him while it mattered, and would have done so even now, only that now he does not care one way or the other.

I take it that a man has a right to appoint his life as he sees fit, so that it does not interfere with that of another to the latter's injury. When the conflict is unavoidable, it becomes a matter of the survival of the fittest. Creighton's emotions and impulses were none of my affair, and his own reasons for them were his exclusive property. Still one may have a reasonable curiosity regarding another's methods and experiences.

There appears to have been but two secrets in Creighton's life, which he kept closeted. It was the last night before he left that I stumbled upon the second one. To the other,—that regarding his courtship and his determining choice of Cordelia, his former wife, he never referred but once,—on that first evening. There was no bitterness in the tone in which he spoke of her then,—rather one of deep respect, and a naive appreciation of her, with a touch of deprecation of himself as a husband.

On this last evening before his departure for the Mediterranean, he was clearing out his writing desk for my use, and as he pulled a roll of papers from a pigeon hole, a small object slipped out and fell to the floor. I stooped and picked it up, and as I turned it over, preparatory to replacing it on the desk, I saw that it was a little

oval, gilt bronze frame. It was at this instant that he glanced up from his papers, noting perhaps a curious expression on my face.

"That is Sister Mary," he said, with the same tone, deprecatory of self, in which he had spoken of Cordelia.

The coincidence impressed me even at the time, and became afterwards a subject of some secret speculations on my part.

I walked over and held the frame under the table light, and looked with some interest at Mary,—who was disposed to be a sister to him (and which proposed relationship he seemed for some unexplained reason to resent),—*Mary*, who did not count.

It was a slender figure, seated on a low stool,—and very erect from the waist up. A broad flowered-silk skirt, that hid the stool and spread generously over the floor, blended into a slim bodice which ended where the rising fulness of the bosom curved upward to the neck. And over this bodice was draped, low down upon the upper arms, a black open-work lace shawl, leaving the sloping shoulders quite bare in their slender plumpness. About her small neck was a narrow ribbon of black velvet, clasped at the front with a dainty buckle set with tiny pearls.

The pliant fingers of her two hands were interlaced and the forefingers pressed to her lips, hiding the expression of her mouth,—and a pair of serious, eager eyes looked straight through mine into the unfathomable spaces behind me. There was a primness and piquancy about her that suggested the posing in old daguerreotypes, but with a softer dressing of the hair in thick folds close about her head and ears.

It was on the whole a face and form true to what was evidently Creighton's approved "type" of woman,—yet quite different. This difference between her and the other five was perhaps rather greater than the difference of the five from each other.

"How old was she when this was taken?" I asked of Creighton. Save for the skirt reaching to the floor, and the sedateness of her pose, I should have guessed her age at fifteen.

"She was nineteen then. It was years ago," he replied from over the papers he was sorting.

"And where is Mary now?" I questioned indifferently, laying the frame upon the table.

"Oh, Mary got reckless waiting for her dreams to come true, and *plunged*. She married the first male thing that happened along that morning, and in consequence spent a few years trying to be happy with her husband and reading about affinities in the abstract, until she mustered up her courage and spent a period in North Dakota. Six months afterwards she married an affinity in the concrete, and there she was, the last I heard, stuck—in the concrete."

His voice was so cold and cynical, that I was wondering anew just what part, if any, Mary had played in his life, when he continued with kindlier note.

"Mary is all right. She has a rich mind, rich in oriental splendors and imagery,—a mind of splendid depths with cool and refreshing caverns, but roughened and tempestuous above ground. She could inspire a sign-painter with the genius of a Raphael, or a decent farmer's boy with the power of a Morgan, if she could only concentrate those inner forces of hers into a continuous performance. She will make something of a woman some day, but it will take more than a dozen affinities to do the trick."

He snapped a rubber band about the package of papers.

"What she needs is a—man."

I picked up the photograph again and studied it in the light of Creighton's comments.

"You may as well keep the thing about," he said, observing my action through the corner of his eye. "*Once*, in my varied career I lost my head,—for seven immortal hours,—and I told a woman, the one there in the picture, that if she ever should need to come to me for refuge, my latch string, or the chain lock or something of the sort

would be out to her,—and the foot-stool waiting on the hearth."

He continued to read over some papers he had pulled out of a drawer, while I studied the picture. So for a time only the ticking of the clock was heard in the room.

"She may turn up any old time," he suddenly broke in as he folded the papers and placed them in a package with the others, "and claim sanctuary. She manages to hit the high places, sooner or later,—and there is still Reno."

He tied the packages together and laid them on the chair beside him.

"If there are any books of the Ellen Key order lying about, you will find her notations in them. They used to come to me by mail, with about the same regularity and persistence that the latest editions of 'Daily Helps for Daily Needs' arrived from my widowed aunt in Nova Scotia."

And it was then that it suddenly occurred to me that there might be here a complication wholly unprovided for among the new and novel duties Creighton had conferred upon me with such prodigality.

"But if she *should* come, while you are always!" I ejaculated.

"She is yours."

He pushed back his chair from the desk, and arose with the packages in his hands and made for his bed-chamber.

"I will throw in the apartment and all that is in it," he supplemented as he passed me. "You can wire Clayborn, and file the cuts off the cross, and send down a shroud. It will be the last thing on earth I'll want."

So Mary,—prim, erect, eager Mary,—in the little gilt bronze frame,—did not count. And I dropped her into the table drawer. The five who counted were quite enough for a single-minded recluse of a bachelor to cope with, and I closed the drawer with a smack of relief, thankful from my inmost soul that there were limits even to Creighton's versatility.

I cannot affirm in good faith that the experiment of Creighton's added anything new or of particular value to the study of women, or that it afforded any special aid to erotic research, other than to confirm anew the mystery of the sex, and again demonstrate its aversion to all law.

It was an Irish mine-boss who, when asked by the company's president if his newly invented ore drill was a success on its try-out, responded after deep and honest consideration,

"Pr-r-actically *no,* but thayatrically *yis.*"

Theatrically speaking, the experiment of Creighton's was undoubtedly a success.

Note: The second part of this story will be printed in the next number.

MANY men begin life by sowing a few wild oats, and eventually work up an excellent grain business.

POPULARITY: being offensive in an inoffensive way.

THE END OF CLARENCE

By Henry Hugh Hunt

LIFE had been one long, gay revel to Clarence, until something went wrong with his heart and the doctors gave him but two or three months to live.

He continued to go about as usual, but the thought of leaving so entertaining a world grieved him extremely. He began to wish that he could make himself miserably unhappy, in the weeks which remained to him, so that he might, with less difficulty, become reconciled to his fate. But, never having had any experience in making himself unhappy, he didn't know how.

However, Clarence had an experienced friend who showed him a way; and he followed it. He married.

And so sound was his friend's advice that, within two weeks, Clarence ceased to regret the sentence which the doctors had pronounced upon him. Leaving the world seemed, to him, like a pleasant adventure.

It does still. He's been married for six years.

I HEARD A BIRD

By Bertha Bolling

I HEARD a bird, low singing in the dusk;
I kissed a flower, as sweet as Orient musk;
I saw a silver star, against Night's blue;
I heard—I kissed—I looked, dear love, on you!

I felt the warm rain beating on my breast;
I caught a wildflower, by the winds caressed,
I touched its velvet softness, sweet with dew—
I felt, I breathed, I held and worshiped, you!

WHEN a woman is sure that a man loves her, she tests his love in every imaginable way. When a man is sure a woman loves him, he looks around for an exit.

PANTS AND THE MAN*

A ONE-ACT PLAY

By Harlan Thompson

CHARACTERS

A. RUBIN, *cleaner and presser.*
THE FAT ONE.
SADIE, *Rubin's daughter* (*A voice*).
THE YOUNG MAN.
THE THIN ONE.
THE GIRL.
SMITHERS, *a policeman.*

SCENE: It is about 6:30 o'clock on an evening in early spring in the cleaning and pressing shop of A. RUBIN. *The failing daylight practically has given up the attempt to enter the two windows, one on either side, both very small and very dirty. The only doorway is at the back, to the left. It connects with the front room of the shop. The opening is hung with frowsy, green curtains, tired of being pushed aside and showing their resentment by flinging lint on every passer. In the center, back against the wall, a steam pressing machine hisses its displeasure at the prolongation of a tryng day. A tiny storeroom is partitioned off in the rght-hand corner. The rest of the room is shared by a long, wooden bench on the right—that had a position in a shoe store in its prime—and a tailor's table with two or three satellitic chairs. A glass-doored cabinet, burdened with assorted clothes, leans heavily against the left wall. The uncomfortable gentlemen of the fashion plates serve to hide some of the dinginess of the walls and in this are assisted by a variety of dusty signs. "Pressing Done While You Wait," reads one—and another, nearer the door: "Our Business Is Strickly Cash."*

At the machine are RUBIN *and a pair of trousers. To judge from the expanse of the latter they have come from the pair of prodigious legs crossed laboriously at the far end of the bench. Above the legs is an expanse of newspaper held by a pair of puffy fists, so that all to be seen of the owner is—beginning at the bottom—two super-yellow shoes, two purple socks, two lavender garters, an hiatus of woolly underwear and the tail of an intensely striped shirt. The shock to the more sensitive souls in the audience is mitigated by the deepening gloom.*

RUBIN, *as well as can be made out, is middle-sized, middle-aged, middle-class, with a reddish, bristly beard that makes of a collar a useless luxury. His clothes are invaluable as a warning to his customers.*

It is growing perceptibly darker.

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THE FAT ONE:

(*From behind the paper.*) Got 'em done?

RUBIN:

You could have 'em in a couple of minutes, mister.

THE FAT ONE:

Let's have a little speed. I got to get something to eat.

RUBIN:

Always you must be in a hurry—a hurry—a hurry! If you couldn't wait, why don't you go out to the café on the corner? Maybe I could bring 'em over to you when I got 'em done, eh?

THE FAT ONE:

Please, I ask you, get to work on the pants. Just 'cause you got me where I can't do nothin' you got to rub it in. . . . (*Back to the paper; then flinging it down, disclosing a struggling vest, deserted by the coat, but still managing to contain the bulk within.*) . . . Say, you might at least give a guy a little light to read by.

RUBIN:

What's the matter, you goin' blind? Plenty of light yet, but with some customers they have all the time got to be kickin' to be satisfied. (*He protestingly turns to a switch hanging near the pressing machine and snaps on the lights. The one over the machine has a makeshift shade. The other bulbs glare piercingly through their coating of dust.*)

THE FAT ONE:

That helps a lot. (*He sinks back to his reading. After a longish pause, the electric bell on the wall clangs violently, stopping only with the banging of the street door.*)

RUBIN:

(*Calling.*) Sadie! Oh, Sadie!

SADIE:

(*From the other room.*) Yes, papa. It's . . . It's a *gentleman* come to see you, papa . . . No, it ain't a gentleman, papa. He just wants his pants pressed.

RUBIN:

All right. Send him back.

(*Through the door appears a young man—handsome, naturally, for he is the hero. Evidently, he has just dressed for dinner. He glances curiously about the room, starts slightly at sight of* THE FAT ONE, *trouserless, and comes forward under the lights. It is then seen that his trousers are drenched with mud and water from the ankles to the knees. The young man, whose name is immaterial and who probably wouldn't care to give it anyway in these surroundings, remains looking down in smiling dismay.*)

RUBIN:

How do you do, mister? You want something?

THE YOUNG MAN:

I say, could you fix these up for me right off?

RUBIN:

Sure—if you would take them right off. It wouldn't take two minutes. Give 'em to me.

THE FAT ONE:

Wait a minute, here! Where am I comin' in?

RUBIN:

Say! Can't you see the gentleman's in a hurry? You could wait five minutes, I guess it wouldn't hurt you.

THE FAT ONE:

(*In whining complaint.*) I tell you, I'm in just as much of a hurry as he is. Maybe you think I like to set around here in a draft, taking my death of cold. It ain't fair a bit.

RUBIN:

You should care about a draft. You got plenty besides clothes to keep *you* warm. (*To* THE YOUNG MAN.) Let me have 'em, please.

THE YOUNG MAN:

I say, I—I don't wish to intrude. If this fellow—

RUBIN:

It's all right, mister. He won't make no trouble at all. When they have got the pants off, it don't make no difference what you do to 'em.

THE YOUNG MAN:

How's that? What has that to do with it?

RUBIN:

Huh! Lots to do with it, you bet you. When they have got the pants off—just like little babies, just like little babies. All they can do is cry, cry, cry—and all the fight it is gone. Tell 'em what you want to—call 'em what you want to; they don't do nothing. But don't you argue with no customer when he has got 'em on yet. He would walk out on you or slap you in the nose maybe. Wait till they have got the pants off . . . just like the performing animals in the circus . . . with a whip I bet you they would make rollings on the floor . . . and then come and lick you by the hand.

THE YOUNG MAN:

That's a curious thing, if you're right about it. When they haven't their trousers you can do anything you wish with them, eh? By George, do you know, that backs up a pet theory of mine. I worked the whole thing out once, but this is the first time I ever ran across it in real life. (*Running on, half to himself.*) I took it up from a psychological standpoint. It's really quite simple if you consider it in the light of associated ideas. To begin with, one must remember that in most of the civilized world trousers are the distinguishing sign of masculinity.

RUBIN:

That's right, mister. You are taking the words right out of my mouth.

THE YOUNG MAN:

Take the boy when he puts on his first pair of long trousers. He becomes a man by the act, at least in his own estimation, and trousers remain the symbol of manhood to him through all the rest of his life. The thing can be worked out right on through. By the same association of ideas, petticoats have come to signify woman and her attributes, just as trousers stand for man and his characteristics. Understanding this, it follows inevitably that if we take away the trousers, we take away the man.

RUBIN:

I tell you, that's just what I've said all the time.

THE FAT ONE:

What's all this got to do with getting some work done? Can't we have a little service?

RUBIN:

(*Taking* THE YOUNG MAN'S *trousers from him.*) I wouldn't listen to him. . . . (*With a knowing grin*) . . . He has got 'em off.

(*As Rubin sets to work* THE FAT ONE *glances interestedly at* THE YOUNG MAN'S *well-muscled calves and the portion of silk underwear above them. Apparently he is rather impressed with this last unmistakable evidence of affluence.*)

THE FAT ONE:

Say, friend, would you mind telling me what in the devil you got mixed up with?

THE YOUNG MAN:

The trousers, you mean? Why, a chauffeur down the street noticed a mud puddle and reached it before I saw him. As he turned the corner he nearly fell out of his seat from laughing. I ran across this place and brought the wreckage in.

THE FAT ONE:

What was all that nutty stuff you was pullin' just now about not wearin'—trousers, as you call 'em?

THE YOUNG MAN:

Do you ever dream?

THE FAT ONE:

Dream? Regular nightmares!

THE YOUNG MAN:

Then I can explain it best that way. Haven't you ever dreamed you were on the street or somewhere in a crowd and then suddenly discover you had lost your trousers?

THE FAT ONE:

Have I? Listen to me, pardner. It wasn't more'n a week ago I dreamt I was at the policeman's ball. New suit and everything—and the girl? Kid, she put it over anything on the floor. We'd just got through a dance when the first thing I knew my pants was gone. I give the whole place the up and down and never seen a thing of 'em. Oh, God! It was awful. Seemed like I couldn't tell whether the rest of the gang noticed it or not, but take it from me, friend, I didn't waste no time on the get-away. Busted into the first place I come to and run into a bigger bunch than ever. So many I didn't have no room to run, and besides, there was somethin' kept holdin' me back all the time. The next place I hit turned out to be the ladies dressing room—and then I woke up! Say, pal, I was weaker'n an oyster, and I—

THE YOUNG MAN:

(*Triumphantly.*) A perfect example of my theory! I realize my débutante friends would probably quote Dr. Freud to me and give an explanation I couldn't repeat even to you, but I can show you right off how that sort of dream proves my trouser theory. You didn't feel very brave or strong or manly in the dream, did you? I'll wager you would have stolen or lied or committed high treason to get those trousers back. It is only another proof that trousers are the symbol of manhood, even to the subconscious mind of the dreamer, and that when the symbol vanishes, the qualities it stands for follow suit.

THE FAT ONE:

Friend, I can hear you fine, but what you say means less to me than my laundryman—and he's a Chink. I don't care what your little game is, kid, but it don't get by with me.

(*He retreats into the paper as the street door starts the bell off again.*)

SADIE:

(*Calling from the other room.*) Papa-aa-a! Nother pair o' pants—and I'm going up to supper.

RUBIN:

A'right, Sadie. Right back here, Mr. Customer.

(*Enter* THE THIN ONE. *Not only is he thin, but scrawny—scrawny neck, scrawny eyes, scrawny soul. It will be discovered later anyway, so he might as well be branded now as a rent collector. He looks about, nods jerkily to* THE YOUNG MAN *and sits on the bench.*)

RUBIN:

Only two ahead of you, mister. Take 'em off, please.

THE THIN ONE:

(*In the treble clef.*) I'll just leave them on for a while, thanks. . . . (*At the voice the newspaper jerks perceptibly and* THE FAT ONE *peeks over. He tries to hide again, but it is useless.*) . . . Why, howdy do, Mr. Peck? I didn't expect to see you here, I'm sure.

THE FAT ONE:

Guess not.

THE THIN ONE:

What a surprise! They told me you were out of town. It's a fortunate thing we met. If you remember, Mr. Peck, I have a little matter to take up with you? (*Sliding over and peering over the paper.*) There is still ten dollars due on last month's rent, Mr. Peck.

THE FAT ONE:

Say, I'll see you after pay day on that, old man. Fix it all up. . . . (*With an elephantine gesture*) . . . See you after the first.

THE THIN ONE:

If you remember, Mr. Peck, you said you would see me after the first the

last time, but you must have seen me before I saw you. Now's a very good time to settle it up, Mr. Peck. I would even say now is going to be the time to settle it up. I should hate to be compelled to employ stern measures, Mr. Peck, but if I must—I must.

THE FAT ONE:

Look here now, I'm not trying to get in any trouble over this, you know. I want to do whatever's right. Give you five now and the rest after the first, how's that?

THE THIN ONE:

No, Mr. Peck, I must have the $10. It's very bad to let these things run too long.

THE FAT ONE:

(*Handing him a bill.*) Well, take the money. Now we're all square, ain't we?

THE THIN ONE:

(*Carefully putting it in the watch pocket of his trousers.*) Much obliged, Mr. Peck.

THE YOUNG MAN:

(*To the Fat One.*) Nothing to my theory, eh? Don't you wish you'd had your pants on?

THE FAT ONE:

What's that? . . . Aw, forget it. (*Back to his newspaper refuge.*)

RUBIN *has finished* THE YOUNG MAN'S *trousers and brings them over, at the same time motioning for* THE THIN ONE *to take his off. The ensuing spectacle is enough to make anyone stop and watch.* THE YOUNG MAN *controls his feelings better than it is hoped the audience will.* THE THIN ONE *discloses legs without even room for the bones, which protrude in a prominent array of knobs. The garters, of blue and pink, simply must have been a Christmas present.*

One of THE THIN ONE'S *feet still is entangled when there comes a quick ring of the bell, the slam of the street door and a patter of approaching feet. The curtains are flung apart and a girl —a decidedly pretty girl—dashes in. She may be any type the producer fancies, providing she is pretty—decidedly pretty—and not too tall. Of course, if the author were selecting, he would look for a girl with hair of coppery splendor, cheeks of the rose petal, form of a cypress tree, eyes of the celebrated soul-stirring type—but why catalogue? It's notoriously true that the author is the least considered in putting on a play.*

THE GIRL, *whatever her complexion, dashes in, but halts at the chaos her coming has wrought.* THE THIN ONE, *still struggling to free his other foot, gives one glance, reaches the table in a series of frenzied hops and dives beneath it.* THE YOUNG MAN *conquers a momentary paralysis and puts aside all discrimination in seeking shelter. In his blind haste he collides with a heap of clothing on a chair and straightway attempts to burrow to its center. Garments fly to either side until all that remains is a painfully plaid overcoat. This he seizes and buttons about him somewhat after the fashion of a Scotch kilt.*

THE FAT ONE, *sulking in his paper tent, is the last to rouse. When it is evident from the confusion that something is amiss, he looks out to find* THE GIRL'S *eyes fixed on him. Without an instant's hesitation the bench topples over backward with a tremendous flourish of ponderous limbs. The momentum rolls him to the door of the storeroom, which he tries to enter—only to wedge, with much futile kicking, in the opening. Foiled there, he wrenches loose and scrambles back to cover behind the bench, over which a timorous head appears a little later to keep tab on developments.* RUBIN *alone has remained inactive. With jaw sagging lower and lower, he has watched the upheaval with speech and motorpower fled.*

THE GIRL:

Oh, for heaven's sake, come out of it! . . . I haven't got time for a lot of foolishness like this. . . . There's a policeman looking for me out there and

I need some help. . . . I need it bad, I tell you. . . . (*Looking at each of them disgustedly.*) . . . Can't you even say anything?

THE YOUNG MAN:

Why-a . . . uh . . . I . . . ah . . . ug . . . u-u-m . . .

THE GIRL:

What's the matter with this bunch? Do you shrinking violets imagine that any girl who has looked through the ads in the magazines or been to a college track meet could scare up a blush now? Men are such simps!

THE YOUNG MAN:

You say you're in trouble? I'll be glad to help you. (*As he steps forward the overcoat slips. He retrieves it, panic-stricken.*) I would be glad to help you, but you see . . . under the circumstances . . . you see . . .

THE GIRL:

Yes! Just because *you* haven't got on quite as many clothes as you think you ought to, *I'll* probably have to go to jail. If you were a swimming teacher or a Russian dancer you probably couldn't do anything on account of being *over*dressed. Fine luck I have.

THE YOUNG MAN:

But why do you have to go to jail and how did you happen to come in here?

THE GIRL:

If you had Smithers after you, I guess you wouldn't be particular where you went. Smithers is the cop outside, and he's too ornery even to be a cop. When his brother was a floorwalker down at the store, Smithers got all crazy about me. I turned the big stiff down, and he was wild. He said he'd make me pay for it . . . and he did all right. The two of them framed it up and got me pinched for stealing. Smithers thought he had me then. When they threw me in jail he showed up and said he could square it if I'd be a good sport. I slapped him in the face. Then he went and got his brother to lie and convict me. The old fool of a judge decided I was a "victim of the city" and would have to stay in the country if I got a parole. . . . Did you ever live in a small town? . . . Jail was a lot better, so I sneaked back, got another job and kept away from Smithers—until tonight. Ran right into him on the street, but got away in the crowd and beat it in here. He's out there now, looking for me. Please don't let him take me to jail again. You will help me get away somehow, won't you?

THE FAT ONE:

(*From behind the bench.*) You bet we will.

THE THIN ONE:

(*Poking his head from under the table.*) Rely upon me, lady.

THE YOUNG MAN:

That window is your best chance. (*To* RUBIN.) It's open to the alley, isn't it?

(RUBIN *manages to nod, but is not yet capable of actual speech.* THE YOUNG MAN *unlatches the window at the right, raises it and beckons to* THE GIRL. THE FAT ONE *and* THE THIN ONE *venture from their shelters as she starts to leave. All stop rigid as the bell jangles.*)

THE GIRL:

(*In a terrified whisper.*) *That's him now!*

(*While the others stare helplessly,* THE YOUNG MAN *quickly notices the half-open door of the storeroom and points it out. As a heavy tread comes from the other room,* THE GIRL *slips noiselessly across and disappears just before Smithers bursts through the curtains. He finds* THE YOUNG MAN, *the overcoat finally abandoned, idly drumming on the window pane.* THE FAT ONE *sits on the overturned bench, whistling a labored little tune.* THE THIN ONE *is enthralled by a book of tailor's samples.* RUBIN *again is groggy with the course of events.*)

SMITHERS:

Any o' you guys seen a lady come in here?

THE YOUNG MAN:

A lady? In here? What's the joke?

SMITHERS:

Well, did you see one or not?

THE YOUNG MAN:

I'm sure we would have noticed one. But isn't this rather an extraordinary place to look for one?

SMITHERS:

Look here, the rest of you, was there a girl come in here?

THE FAT ONE:

Hell, no.

THE THIN ONE:

I assure you not, Mr. Officer.

SMITHERS:

(*Turning on* RUBIN.) Say, Jew, you better give it to me straight. Was she?

(*The anxiety of the others is evident as* RUBIN *writhes under the policeman's gaze. At last, with an effort, he straightens up and shakes his head.*)

RUBIN:

No, Mister Cop.

(SMITHERS *glares around at the others who are grinning in relief and suddenly points.*)

SMITHERS:

Then what's that window doing open?

THE YOUNG MAN:

Why,—it was so fearfully stuffy in here, you know, I opened it myself.

SMITHERS:

Yeh, you opened it yourself, all right. (*Striding to the window.*) I suppose you helped her climb out, too, didn't you? You're a slick one, *you* are. Hah! I could tell which way she went just by watching you.

THE YOUNG MAN:

My dear officer, I bow to your superior mentality. Good evening, sir, and much success to your mission.

SMITHERS:

(*Crawling out the window.*) Go to hell!

(*As his last leg is swinging over the sill there comes a sound of quick movement in the storeroom with a squeal, suddenly hushed, but unmistakably feminine. Smithers clambers back inside, gloatingly sarcastic.*)

SMITHERS:

So-o-oo? You tried to put one over on me, didn't ya? A fine bunch of liars. Hadn't seen her at all—

THE GIRL:

(*Appearing at the storeroom door, almost in tears.*) Doggone it all, why did there have to be a mouse in there? It . . . makes . . . me . . . so . . . mad. . . . Well, the luck's with you again. What are you going to do with me, Smithers?

THE YOUNG MAN:

Officer Smithers is going to take you down to the station and tell all the boys what a wonderful capture he made and how smart he was to make it.

SMITHERS:

Is that so? Well, I was smart enough to spoil you're little game, all right.

THE YOUNG MAN:

Not smart, Smithers—lucky. If the mouse hadn't helped you out, you'd be down in the next block now. And let me give you a pointer, Mr. Holmes. The next time you wonder whether a woman his climbed through a window or not, just notice if the dust has been disturbed (*drawing his finger across the sill and holding it up*) and save yourself the trouble. Tell the rest of the force. They might like to know about it.

SMITHERS:

You're pretty wise, ain't you? (*pointing*) for a bird that's only got one pair of pants. Think you're better'n an officer of the law.

THE YOUNG MAN:

Hardly that, Smithers. I just go on the assumption that a policeman is either a fool or a crook—or he wouldn't be a policeman.

SMITHERS:

Say, I've handled guys like you before. Want to make a big play before the moll here, don't you? Well, I got a hunch I can fix you up so she won't be stuck on your looks.

THE YOUNG MAN:

Bravely said, officer, bravely said! It takes courage, I tell you, when you only have a club and revolver, to threaten a man who hasn't either. I've often wondered how a policeman would act if he ever really had to fight fair.

SMITHERS:

Fight fair, huh? Maybe you'd like to fight fair. Well, I'll just take you on, Mr. Wise Guy, right now, and give you the chance you've been looking for. (*He jerks out his club, lays it on the table, and follows it with his coat and revolver.*) There now. It's going to do me a lot of good to fight fair with you. . . . And if any of the rest of youse makes a move at that gun, there's goin' to be a killin', do you get me?

THE YOUNG MAN:

I don't wish to appear exacting, Smithers, but there is one other little matter you have overlooked. (*Pointing.*) Your trousers, please.

SMITHERS:

What's the game? *What's* the game? Come on, you four-flusher. Trying to crawl out of it now?

THE YOUNG MAN:

Oh, I forgot that. I was explaining it before you came. It wouldn't be a fair fight at all, Smithers, if you had trousers and I had none. A man without trousers isn't really a man at all. Why do you suppose there are so many burglars that you policemen try to catch, but don't? Simply because burglars know from experience that nine out of ten men, brave enough in their trousers, will cover up their heads in the bed clothes and shiver until morning if they hear one in the house. I'm sorry you weren't here when we took the matter up more fully, but I am sure you can see my position.

SMITHERS:

I can see you're tryin' to sneak out of the worst beatin' you ever got in your life, but you don't get out of this on that kind of a stall, because I'm goin' to call your little bluff. (*He strips off all that remains of his uniform, revealing probably the reddest flannel extant.*) Now come on, you movie hero!

(*The two approach each other warily, like professional pugilists, with the space in the center as the ring. The others form an irregular circle at the back.* SMITHERS *makes a sudden rush at* THE YOUNG MAN, *who dodges just as* THE GIRL, *slipping over to the hanging switch, turns out the lights. The sudden darkness is filled with cries, struggles and the sound of overturning furniture. In the midst of the confusion a man's voice begins to cry loudly for help—then is choked off suddenly. After more confusion,* SMITHERS' *voice is heard in gruff command.*)

SMITHERS:

Come on with them lights, Jew. Come on with them lights!

(RUBIN *snaps the switch and reveals the room, sadly wrecked. Smithers is astride an adversary behind the overturned table.* THE FAT ONE *is in his favorite refuge behind the bench. No one else is in sight.*)

SMITHERS:

(*Tugging at his victim.*) Got enough, have you? . . . Come on out of it, then. . . . Why, what? . . .

(*From behind the table crawl the battered remains of* THE THIN ONE.)

SMITHERS:

(*Rather dazedly.*) Where are they? Where are they? Where'd they go? (*The silence answers him.*) Where's my clothes? (*Hurried searching fails*

to discover uniform, club or revolver. He starts out the door in pursuit of the missing ones, but thinks better of it.) Can't you see they're gettin' away? And I can't do nothin'! (*He sees* THE THIN ONE'S *trousers, draped over the only chair left standing. He seizes them, scrambles into them as far as he can, and dashes out.*)

THE THIN ONE:

(*Weakly, from the bench to which he has tottered.*) Stop! Come back! They're mine!

(THE FAT ONE *has been busy behind the bench. He now emerges, having resumed his trousers and his self-reliance.*)

THE FAT ONE:

Shut up, you poor simp! What are you hollering about? Listen here, I'm going to need that ten I gave you. Come on, let's have it.

(THE THIN ONE *hesitates a moment, then reaches for his trousers pocket—to find there is none.*)

THE THIN ONE:

(*Plaintively.*) It's gone.

THE FAT ONE:

(*Reaching into* THE THIN ONE'S *vest pocket and pulling out some bills.*) Never mind, this'll do. Much obliged. I'll see you after the first.

(*He goes out.* RUBIN *looks* THE THIN ONE over, squares his stooped shoulders and advances on him.)

RUBIN:

(*Sternly.*) Where's the money for pressing the pants?

THE THIN ONE:

You didn't press them.

RUBIN:

Is it my fault if you help to cheat me out of my money? I have got to have the pay.

THE THIN ONE:

I haven't got any.

RUBIN:

Shame upon you, cheating an honest man. I will make you pay! (*He drags from the unresisting* THIN ONE *his coat and vest.*) Out of my shop, you loafer!

(*The terrified* THIN ONE, *pursued by* RUBIN, *flees through the door as the curtain falls.*)

EVERY time a man's engagement is announced, some woman wonders if the announcement is the result of her coolness several years before. Every time a girl's engagement is announced, some man wonders how he escaped her clutches.

HAVE you seen a cat play with a mouse? That is the way a woman plays with a man who loves her—with this difference. The mouse sometimes escapes.

THE SUICIDE

By Julia Gardiner

ALL the day she had planned for this hour. . . .

She had nothing left to live for.

Just as the sun was setting behind the ridge of purple hills across the bay she had crept to the cliff.

She shuddered as she heard the waves crashing against the rocks and thought how cold the water would be.

Peering over the ragged precipice she saw a swimmer below.

He swam with long, easy strokes, occasionally tossing back his head so that she caught a flash of bronze cheek and smooth black hair. . . .

All the day she had planned for this hour.

Daintily touching a puff of *poudre de riz* to her titlted nose, she jumped.

LIE TO ME, MILLICENT

By W. F. Jenkins

LIE to me, Millicent, please lie to me. Tell me how you have missed me during my absence. Tell me that you have thought of no one but me. Tell me that you have hardly cared to go out of the house, since I was not to be the one to take you. Tell me that you have a new gown you selected just because you thought I would like it. Tell me that since the day I went away people have been asking you why you were so sad, and only stopped the day you had my letter telling you I was returning at once. Lie to me, Millicent, please lie to me. I have not heard a lie in months. I have been in a lumber-camp where there were no women.

WHEN a man hates a woman it is because she has made him hate himself. When a woman hates a man, it is because he has refused to love her.

THE instinct to lie is the fruit of the tree of knowledge of women.

THE LOVE PRISON

By G. Vere Tyler

I

HE found it necessary, in his daily life, to respond to so many of his wife's fads that it seemed to him, wild and unreasonable as was the idea, he might just as well respond to this one.

Olive was a woman who, if she became established in a city hotel, spent her time dreaming of how happy she would be on a yacht in mid-ocean. In other words, she was only happy while dwelling in the fantastic realms of her imagination.

The present idea, entered into with all the enthusiasm of a novice bent upon the veil, was an old and remote Colonial home in Virginia. What she told her husband was that she wished to retire with him there, and dream. In addition to her opportunity to dream, she also finally succeeded in convincing him that the best way for a man successfully to carry out his great projects is, for the better part, to get away from them —away from the scene of action.

She talked a lot about perspective, and when her husband was the subject of her enthusiasm, she talked well. In addition to her idea from the practical point of view, Olive added that everybody who could bought a Colonial home in Virginia at some time, including Theodore Roosevelt, and that the beautiful Langhorne sisters were always going back there.

Mr. Rockwell, inwardly remarking that he saw no reason for moulding his life after the beautiful Langhorne sisters, even after Teddy, for that matter, and that it was a fact well known to himself that people owning those Colonial homes rarely stayed in them, decided, as was his rule, that when Olive had a whim, to efface the whim by exploiting it.

The advertisement inserted in the leading newspapers of Virginia brought them an unheard of number of answers. It would seem, so Marvin Rockwell told his wife, that everybody in Virginia in possession of a Colonial home was trying to get rid of it.

They were quite a week making their selection of a dozen or more places they would visit to inspect, but the seventh on the list was the first to actually impress them.

Mrs. Rockwell, a bit disheartened by the reality of things she saw, as compared with what had been written concerning the historic habitations, reached the place with her interest somewhat diminished. The house itself, however, was calculated to awaken enthusiasm in a far less impressionable person than Olive. It emphasized all that could possibly be imagined as remote and Colonial, and had a porch as broad and deep and high as that of any fairy palace intent upon reaching the sky. The Corinthian columns that supported the massive top were yards and yards in circumference and, Olive concluded, most imposing.

"This," said her husband, by way of agreeing, and also to encourage his own spirits, "looks like something!"

And he gave her his hand up the three steps that led to it.

Olive was far too ecstatic to reply.

With her back to the massive front door, situated quite fifteen feet away from her, and still holding the hand of her husband, she looked out on the

stretch of scenery that included in the distance a sweep of the James River. At this moment it was placid and beautiful as it melted to gold in the reflection of the setting sun. The ancient trees of the yard, that included several magnolias, were sufficiently foliaged to separate them from old sol's blazing rays, and the cool deepening shadow in which they stood instantly filled Olive with the happiness that she believed lay in just such a place as this.

Turning her face, in the moment a very pretty one, to her husband, she informed him in a voice mechanical but emphatic, that she had already begun to dream. . . . Mr. Rockwell was not cruel enough to say that he, too, had begun to dream of some hostelry where they might get supper.

The old-fashioned brass knocker was responded to by the proverbial colored woman who was by now quite used to showing the place to strangers.

She invited them to enter with all the courtesy of her former mistress when receiving guests, and they began their tour of inspection.

The rear of the house—by way of whim of the original owner—had a porch that corresponded to the one in front, and nothing but these two grand old porches seemed, or so Olive thought, at ease.

The interior, though magnificent enough, might, for all its appearance, have been recently in the hands of marauding soldiers. It was peculiarly disarranged, and the disarrangement had in it a tragic appeal. Everything that had apparently been begun toward creating modern magnificence had been interrupted and left unfinished. Half of the walls of the immense high-ceilinged drawing-room were hung in scarlet brocade. The remaining rolls of silk lay on the floor. A corner of the magnificent ballroom had been dug into for the installation, so they were told, of an organ. Rare pieces of furniture stood about like neglected and agonized sentinels, things forgotten, but yet on duty. The entire second floor, including the halls, had been hung in flowered silk. As an offset, however, to this completion, jars of paint and varnish were standing about, their contents dried.

There was nothing Colonial in these surprising revelations of arrested intention. It was apparently the madness of an unfinished dream.

"You'll sure do see a madcap house when you looks at dis one!" the old colored woman explained apologetically.

She then grew eloquent in her accounts of the mansion when owned by "old marster and ole Miss." As to the last owner she was silent, and not even a stout bribe could unbridle her tongue. The position she held as guardian of the old home was confidence in her honor.

Having been assured by Olive that the old colored woman's silence put the final mystery to the place that made it "simply fascinating," Mr. Rockwell practically agreed to buy it. With the respect the old negress' portly presence and heroism demanded—she had even refused the tip for her services as guide—he then politely inquired of her if she could direct them to some place where they might hope for one of those famous Virginia suppers that—according to what he had heard—invariably brewed indigestion in those not used from birth to the likes of them.

She could inform them and did, even going so far as to go with them to the front porch and point to a smoking chimney in the distance which indicated, she assured them, that such a supper was already being prepared. It seemed to them to give her pleasure to offer the assurance that while strangers were rare, the proprietor's guests being mostly relatives who didn't pay, a hearty welcome would undoubtedly await them at Egleston Inn.

II

EGLESTON INN proved to be one of those old wooden structures with a double verandah, dining-room in the basement, and, of course, going to decay.

The parlor, apparently rarely used,

was musty, and had furniture as dilapidated and old as the crumbling trees outside. But—for the May nights were still chilly—a splendid hickory fire was built for them in the big old fireplace, and it was from the proprietor, an impoverished aristocrat, and, as a rule, the sole guest of his own hotel, that they heard the story of the home they elected to purchase.

Up to the time of the last owner, the one about whom the old colored woman had been so persistently silent, it had been a normal Colonial homestead, the kind that abound in Virginia. Warren Hartwell had inherited it from his parents and upon his return from Europe had offered it for sale and as suddenly shown up there with a wife.

"Europe?" inquired Mr. Rockwell.

"So he lived abroad first?" added Olive.

The proprietor of Egleston Inn gave them each a look, indicative of his intention to explain all. Having seated himself, and stretched out his somewhat muddy but narrow boots to the inviting blazes, he began:

"Warren Hartwell," he said, and no one could deny the pride in his voice, "was perhaps the finest musician America ever produced, certainly Virginia. At an early age he was sent abroad to complete his studies of the piano and organ and people liked to talk about the wonderful strides he made, and of his practising nine hours a day. In Paris he studied under Widor and Vierner for the organ; in Berlin under the renowned Scharwenka for the piano. It was in Berlin at the Beethoven-Saal that his first heralded performance took place—a performance that made him famous. The critics who assembled to scoff at the crude American were unanimous in their praise. That night Warren Hartwell was engaged to appear in Paris, in Vienna, in Petrograd. Upon his return home he immediately electrified not only his native state but most of America by his brilliant performances."

"The name," said Mr. Rockwell, "sounds familiar."

"Didn't he—" asked Olive, but was interrupted by the lifting of a slender and very beautiful forefinger from their host.

"The reason," he continued, "for Hartwell's success was quite simple. In addition to his genius he possessed a superabundance of beauty, and, also, a superabundance of magnetism. It goes without saying that women fell before the magic of his art and personality like chaff before the wind."

Interjected Olive a bit eagerly and with a glance at her husband: "Naturally!"

"One woman, a New Yorker, by the way, who happened to be in possession of great wealth—it might have been partly on account of this, the floral path it opened to him—exerted over Hartwell the only lasting, and at that temporary, passion of his meteorological career. She had known and loved him before he went to Europe to return famous. Her passion for him in the zenith of his glory was a furious flame. From place to place she followed him. He finally married her, and actual possession and ownership increased her madness about him. In the wildness of her infatuation she dreamed—alas for such dreamers—of taking him away from the world."

There was a silence during which a log broke in two, spluttered, and emitted a shower of sparks.

As the proprietor rose to arrange the fire disturbances with a pair of brass tongs, Olive remarked mentally what a tall, graceful, handsome man he was, in spite of his shabby clothes, and Mr. Rockwell noted that his voice, strangely melodious, seemed to linger upon the silence.

"It is the dream," said the gentleman of their mental comment, when he had once more taken his seat and stretched forth his feet, "of most women who love, but this one had the courage to realize her dream. She was a magnificent creature, beautiful, passionate as an awakened tigress. Her belief in herself to undertake a love prison with the object of her devotion as captive,

was not unwarranted, or so, I suppose, she thought. A Colonial home, remote, quiet, an organ, a grand piano, plenty of books, negroes converted to slavery, the lands tilled, the orchards made to bloom and yield, flowers as thick as snowflakes, herself afire with love, himself, daily, hourly, touched by the flames.

"Such dreams rarely materialize satisfactorily! At the expiration of six months—being a man—he tired. No longer did it suffice to give himself to one when the whole world was waiting to open its arms. No longer kisses from one pair of lips when so many were parted in eager anticipation. Secretly one night—for artist Hartwell was neither brave nor courageous—he made his escape; his escape to find numerous organs and pianos to respond to his touch, and the arms of many worshiping women. A month later his wife shot him—and herself."

III

Even the proprietor was surprised at the manner in which Olive started when he ceased to speak.

Having given her a quick glance and then some simple directions as to stairways and lamps, he bade them both, what Olive used afterwards to think, was a beautiful good night.

Her husband, evidently subdued by the tragic story, and also impressed by the fire that was now sufficiently burned down as to be flameless, had his eyes fixed upon it. Carefully turning her own, Olive looked long and earnestly at him, marvelously handsome, she thought, lit up by the red glow from the smouldering logs.

There had come over her, during the innkeeper's recital of the tragic love story, the feeling that *her* idea of a Colonial home had been similar to that other woman's who had wanted to erect a prison for her love. It was as though the doubts and misgivings and yearnings of her own heart had been laid bare to her. She now, all too suddenly, knew that *she* had wanted to take her love from the contact and plaudits of the world; that *she* had wanted to erect a prison house and feed her lover solely upon the products of her heart.

She grew afraid as she faced the fact and that of late she had been in dread of losing her hold on her husband. Once or twice in public places his attention had strayed while she talked. Once or twice she had caught his quick glance in the direction of some other woman. It was these things, she now timidly admitted, that had caused her to, well—find herself just where she was at this very moment.

As she saw herself seated near her husband in this strange isolated place in front of what, in her excited state, seemed a fiery furnace, her heart went out to the woman of the story, the beautiful woman of strong passions, in immense overwhelming sympathy. She seemed to feel herself standing in the grand but desolate old drawing-room, half hung in fiery colored silk, and with rolls of it on the floor. She confronted the massive pieces of furniture standing about like agonized and forsaken sentinels, and passed from them to the dug-out place in the ballroom where the organ was to be. The old colored woman, patient and faithful, oblivious of these things which she guarded sacredly while living over her past, filled her with awe. She somewhat impatiently dismissed her from her mind, only to confront, in greater dread, the portrait of the woman which they had come across in the attic, the woman who had murdered that which she could not hold. She saw the challenge in the wondrous eyes, the challenge that said plainly: "My love against the world—against your fame!" And she saw that same woman defeated and raising the pistol to her temple.

With an admitted shudder she tried to fix her own gaze on the fire that was proving, apparently, so absorbing to her husband. It was growing duller and showing white ashes.

For some reason it seemed to alarm her, and she hurriedly shifted her gaze

to her husband seated rigidly in his chair. He had fallen asleep.

Another perceptible shudder passed over her, and that same fear attacked her as if something were dying out of him like the flames out of the hickory logs.

Perhaps, she thought, something had died out of him, that something all women strive to keep alive in a man—and sooner or later fail.

The futility of imprisoning men for the purpose of holding their hearts attacked her overwhelmingly and with this thought other mad ones came to fill her mind.

As she thought thus her husband's handsome face drew and tortured her. She studied it, glad of the chance, in this strange, old-fashioned, musty room, saturated with the faint odor of pipe smoke and the fainter one of burning hickory, to grow intoxicated, drunk upon her own passion for it.

The thought of the Colonial home, beautiful and tragic, that had become the mausoleum of a love such as hers, intruded and she jumped up, laughed a little wild laugh, and clapped her hands.

Her husband awoke with a start and stared at her.

"What is it?" he asked amazed. "What has happened?"

"Nothing! This place oppresses me! I got hysterical! I can't stand it! We must take the midnight express back to the glare and glitter of old New York!"

And she laughed again.

"I give you my word," and he, too, jumped up, "you couldn't please me better!"

As he turned quickly, now smiling and full of activity, she caught his arm in her two hands and looked up at him.

"Good-bye," she said in a low voice, "good-bye to my beautiful dream of our Colonial home. I could never bear one! I—"

"We're both as tired as the devil dragging around to these ghostly old places!" he answered her. "We'll get a good sleep on the train, and I hope," he freed himself of her touch, "I hope, my dear, you are done with nonsense."

"I'm done!" she said.

THE FINAL BLOW

By Elsie McCormick

I HAVE decided to commit suicide.

I have not been disappointed in love, neither have I lost my money. I have servants to wait on me, no end of gowns, and all that a substantial fortune can buy. But I realize that there is no further hope for me.

Yesterday I heard one man tell another that I had a good, kind face.

A HUSBAND is in much the same position as a chorus-man dancing with a chorus-girl. He sees all the artifices, knows every sham for what it is, and has not even the consolation that some of the shams are for his benefit.

IMMEDIATELY AFTER HE PROPOSED

By George B. Jameson

HE strode down the street, heedless of where he was going. Her voice still echoed in his ears, he repeated over and over again the shy admission that she loved him. He planned the wonderful things they would do, the leisurely honeymoon around the world, the magnificent home he would build for his bride, the smart entertainments they would give. He could scarcely realize that *he* was the fortunate man who had won such a beauty, such a charming woman. He considered his character, his reputation, and his past, and decided upon an improvement in his conduct. He planned the noble, the great things he would accomplish, aided by her inspiration, assisted by her cleverness. He was in a rhapsody of delight.

Immediately after he proposed, she went to her room and carefully burned her love-letters, beginning with the most recent in her collection. Then *she, too,* made her plans. She decided who among her acquaintances she could now afford to snub.

FREEDOM

By Jessie B. Rittenhouse

BE free of me as any bird
That circles in the air,
Be free of me as any cloud
That mountain summits wear;

Be free as any wandering wind
That blows across the sea,
Be free as any restless wave
That moves continually.

For freest things must tire of flight
And restless things must rest,
And all the lonesome winds will drive
You to my breast!

RESISTANCE

By Hugh Kahler

I

MR. OWEN CATESBY awoke with a nameless consciousness of discontent, a vague self-pity quite foreign to his normal state of serene satisfaction with himself and with the world and with life. He did not identify the moods, nor even seek to analyze it, as he splashed in the spiteful sting of his shower and deliberately dressed his big, healthy body in the comfortable, unspectacular clothing of his habit.

He felt, however, that its source was not physical; he was as abundantly health-blessed as usual, without an ache or a heaviness to account of the grayness of his morning view; he even desired his breakfast with his accustomed zest. And it could not have been a business anxiety, a financial uneasiness, which depressed him; his affairs were in excellent order and the day's prospect promised a contract which would yield him the largest commission of his career.

And yet Catesby faced a mild melancholy which he could not ignore, a sense of sadness not altogether unpleasant. He could not understand it. It annoyed him that an impatient effort to shake it off proved unavailing. It annoyed him to find himself singing, in a flatting, nasal tenor, a scrap of doggerel remembered from some dull musical play.

"I wish I had a girlie like the other guys all have."

He cut himself short in the midst of it, with a self-disgusted chuckle of exasperation. What drivel they put over on the public in the name of song! Ugh! Sticky, sentimental rot! Didn't it beat the devil the way such mush lodged in a fellow's skull, when serious things like specifications refused to stay put?

He went down to the big, empty breakfast room of the club still in the grip of his mood, however. He was sorry for himself because he must eat alone—the other members had more liberal views than Catesby's regarding business-hours.

He glanced about the cool, cheerful room with a baffling consciousness of solitude. The waiter's low-voiced greeting elicited only a grunt; he ate liberally without enjoyment and glowered at the headlines of his morning paper, propped against the carafe.

He had nearly finished when Judson stopped beside him with a friendly word. He glanced up eagerly, wistfully, almost. This was better—infinitely better than eating alone in a bare, dispiriting club. He liked Judson mildly, as an infrequently encountered acquaintance with a gift of gentle humor. Judson hardly ever came to the club, these day—married or something, Catesby remembered vaguely.

He was sorry for Judson—it must be a wrench to give up your independence and pawn your life to a woman. Catesby had no place in his cosmos for the sex. Whenever one of his casual friends dropped away from the circle to take his first degree in domesticity, Catesby regarded the spectacle with a condescending pity. It had been so since his schoolboy days, when he had watched the subjugation of his mates with a contemptuous eye, unstirred by emulation.

Judson glanced at the card and ordered deliberately, a man's breakfast, bacon and eggs, cakes, a pot of coffee. There was a kind of suppressed excitement in his tone which Catesby observed without curiosity. His mind was on his own troubles—the troubles which he could not name.

"Sort of good to get back here for a breakfast again," said Judson, unfolding his napkin and arranging his silver. "Like old times, for me. I suppose you don't realize the comfort of it—I never did."

Catesby grunted. Judson didn't know what he was talking about. Comfort! Eating alone in a big, bare room, with a newspaper for company and a day's work for prospect—comfort indeed! But he only said, mechanically:

"Been stopping here?"

"Just a day or two," said Judson. "Mrs. Judson's at Washington—she's interested in this suffrage thing: I expect her back today."

Catesby grunted again and rose.

"Well, I'm due down-town. See you again, perhaps."

He walked away heavily. The absent nods of the desk-clerk and the door-man accented his mood. He emerged on a crisp morning, with a slant, early sun spreading jetty shadows sharply on the swept asphalt. The inhospitable pickets of the little park revealed dying gardens and brown turf below nude boughs, and a mild breeze rustled dry leaves in tune to his melancholy.

Before him, as he walked eastward toward the subway, the figures of men and women on their way to work depressed him anew. He overtook a pair of excruciatingly dapper youngsters; scraps of their talk reached his hostile ear. One of them had been fortunate in an undertaking involving a "skirt" described as "class—be-lieve me-e!" Catesby resisted an impulse to bang the two narrow, barbered skulls together. He quickened his step to escape from the range of sniggers, his chin up, a supercilious disdain on his lips.

And in this mood his eyes rested on a girl. She was walking away from him. He saw only the uniform of her type—short, scant skirt, flaring at the hip, shirt-waist permitting a scarcely-interrupted view of ribboned muslins, trim, high shoes accenting the contour of ankle, a cheaply smart hat.

There was nothing spectacular about the view; thousands of girls shaped and clad in identical fashion were turning their faces to the subway from Brooklyn to the Bronx. But Catesby's pulse quickened raggedly as he glimpsed this one and his hands tightened. Keeping his distance behind her he studied her as she walked, approving the swing of her slim, compact shoulders, the soft, feminine curves, the way her dark hair clung against her neck. He was curiously sure that her face would be charming when he saw it. Instinctively he reasoned out the chances of seeing it. She must be going to the subway, too; by keeping near her he could easily manage a face-to-face moment as they waited for their train.

He followed her cautiously down the stairs to the dead, humid dimness of the station. He was just behind her as she bought her ticket and he snatched savagely at his own, ignoring his change, lest she escape him in the train which thundered in just as she turned away. The guard thrust him into the jammed aisle and the side-door slid shut across his shoulders. But he could see her, clinging to the white-metal support and swaying to the motion of the car. Her back was still toward him. He was queerly eager to see her face. His eyes did not waver from her as the lighted caves of the way-stations slipped by.

At Fourteenth street she turned and he saw that she was—words failed him. Pretty — beautiful — lovely — he discarded them scornfully. She was a flower, a human anemone, fragile, pale, touched with the unearthly beauty of wild things that grow in shadows. He lurched toward her, blindly, impelled by an irresistible force which mocked the petty conventions of usage. He had a mad desire to lay hands on her,

to lift her and dash out of the station like a cave-dweller carrying his captive tree-maiden back to his own place. . . .

Fate and the subway system intervened. She slipped out of the opposite door just as it was closing. Stricken, staring, he stood helplessly and watched her vanish in the local across the platform as his own train jarred into motion. The two ran into the darkness side by side; he pressed roughly to the door and waited breathlessly until he was drawn abreast of the door beyond which she stood. Her profile was visible, infinitely desirable and as remote and inaccessible as a fixed star! He found himself struggling with a blind desire to smash the plate-glass of the doors with his bare hands . . . slowly, inexorably the express drew ahead . . . again he had lost her . . . the tragedy of it shook him with a gust of passionate grief. He felt the burn of tears in his eyes.

Slowly his brain cleared a little as the fog of emotion lifted. He faced realization, aghast. Love—love at first sight—and last! The thing at which he had secretly scoffed all these years was, then, a truth, the biggest, the only truth in life! It was possible for a man to look once into a woman's eyes and thenceforward belong utterly and irrevocably to her, though their eyes should never meet again! He drew a long, quivering, frightened breath at the mystery and wonder of it. He saw himself down an endless avenue of years, loving and longing for this woman—this slender, pale girl whom he had found only to lose again . . . his throat narrowed achingly.

II

Later, as he struggled to fix his mind on the details of a contract which meant a year's expenses if he closed it, he realized that he had begun to pay. Her face, misty and vague, persistently came between his eyes and the typewritten page before him. He could not centre thought on the vital matter of magnesite pipe packings when his whole soul quivered under the agony of loss. He flung the sheets aside and faced his stenographer.

Higgson was an absurd animal in the calling he followed. He had the bulk of a brewery-driver, the vast, mighty shoulders of a hard-rock man or a lumber-jack; he loomed up like a mountain of flesh, and his fingers, as they manipulated the white, minute keys of the machine, seemed scarcely to move. Regarding him, in his new mood, Catesby discovered a sudden flash of impatience with the huge, lumbering animal who used the thews of a Titan for the task of pigmy. It was like keeping a tame elephant, he thought, to pull a perambulator. He discharged Higgson abruptly.

"Get out of here and go to work," he snapped. "It makes me tired to see a big ox like you tickling a typewriter. No—you needn't mind clearing up. Get your hat and get out of sight."

He paid the submissive, puzzled fellow with an angry extravagance and saw the last of him with a sense of relief. Then, realizing that there was work to do, he half repented. It was merely silly to complicate his business for a momentary whim| However—it came upon him forcefully that after all, stenography was women's work. His old prejudice against girls in office employment seemed queerly unreasonable. He telephoned to the employment department of a typewriter company, telling his needs. They promised him quick action.

He went back to his contract, trying to concentrate on it, fighting against the obstinate image of the pale girl beyond the murky glass of a subway door. Would he ever see her again? Would he ever stop wanting to see her—wanting to know her—would the dull, pounding ache grow less, in time? Or worse?

He was still facing the doubt when his door opened to admit a girl. He caught his breath at the sight of her. His hands closed and shook; the image of the flower-like child of the subway

vanished like a phantasm of the cinematograph screen.

This girl was vivid, flaming, obtrusive, like a glaring, strident poppy in a wheat field. She had no soft colors, no half-tones, no vagueness of line or shadow. She was as aggressively brilliant and distinct as a diamond. Her eyes were vividly blue, her hair vividly black, her lips a crimson curve against the flashing, insistent tint of her cheeks. She was dressed in the same key—a close, figure-fitting tailored suit of purple, silhouetting a contour as definite and distinct as the line and curve of chiselled marble. The face was sharply outlined, every feature clear and cleanly cut. She irradiated an impression of completeness, of definition, of solidity. And Catesby found himself fighting back a desperate impulse to fling his arms about her!

"I'm from the Remsmith Company," she announced.

Her voice had the crisp, sharp quality of her aspect. It went through Catesby like the thrust of a needle-pointed rapier. He struggled with the insanity that gripped him. She was unspeakably adorable, but he must rule himself—tread cannily or he would lose her. She would misinterpret—resent—

"Yes," he said thickly. "Can you start now?"

Her sharp, black brows arched. "I—wouldn't it be better to discuss the pay?—I don't know whether—"

"Oh, that's all right." He jerked a contemptuous arm, disposing of petty detail. "Whatever you say—I'm not fussy."

The clear eyes regarded him levelly.

"I'm afraid I am—a little," said the hard voice. "Would you pay twenty-five a week?"

"All right." Higgson had worked for eighteen, but what did money matter? This was only superficial, anyway. He didn't want her for a stenographer—he wanted to take her away—somewhere infinitely remote from the grayness and the commonplace of an office. He had a flashing vision of her against a background of tropic foliage, the electric green of palms, the blue of an equatorial sea, the flashing, acid sun on dazzling walls of coral and roofs of crimson tile . . . there was a blazing flower in her mouth and another caught in that shining night of hair and her head was flung back and to the side, her eyes challenging below lowered lashes. . . .

She seemed about to speak; her lips parted; there was in her face the look of one who stretches forth the bold hand toward the nettle, the reluctant eagerness of one contemplating a duty to be disagreeable. But apparently she repented, for she said nothing. Her head jerked up and back, however, with a kind of defiant warning in the gesture, as if to say that she understood him perfectly and was on guard. The expression magnified the splendor of her in his eyes; against his will he took a step toward her. Words bubbled from his lips unmeditated.

"Do you know how glorious you are? Do you know that you are beautiful? Who are you—what are you doing in work like this when you belong—?"

She drew back coolly, her glance utterly unterrified.

"That will be all of that for yours," she said in a level, grating voice. "I thought I had your number—you gave up twenty-five too easy. Listen: if you want a stenographer I'm a candidate. If you don't—"

"I want you!"

The words burst from him. He stretched out his arms toward her hungrily. Far down in him an amazed incredulity awoke at the sound of his voice.

Was it he who was saying such things to a woman he had never seen before?

Was it Owen Catesby who was raving like a crazy poet to a girl who—he stifled the question.

He loved her! Loved her—it could be nothing less, this overpowering, suffocating madness of longing. He loved her—

She laughed harshly,

"Thanks. I'm not that sort. You're

mistaken. I guess I don't care for the job."

Blackness swept in upon him. She must not go. She didn't understand that his love was honorable, pure, holy, She believed—a flush burned his cheek at the ugly innuendo of the thought. He must make her understand the truth. He groped for words as she hesitated. He could see a wistfulness in that dubiety which in his normal state he would have known at once as springing from a naive preference for twenty-five dollars to fifteen. Now it seemed to him as if she hung in the balance between a calloused caution and a nascent love, like his own.

Before he could speak the door opened and a dapper salesman entered, his face wearing that propitiatory look of self-welcome which is like a badge of office. The tension broke instantly. Catesby's voice was normal and easy as he settled the question.

"Very well, then. We'll consider it settled. Can you stay now—I'd like to get some correspondence cleared up this morning."

"I could come this afternoon," she temporized. "Would that do?"

"All right."

He turned casually to the salesman, completely master of himself once more.

"Well, Turner, what can I do for you?"

He did not look up as the girl departed.

But Turner found him hard to interest and left without the order he had meant to take away with him.

Alone, Catesby faced the situation, his mind clearing as a landscape clears of lifting mists. Aghast, he realized that in a single morning, after all these years, he had fallen madly, blindly in love with two strange women, women utterly unlike the women of his world, women whom he now saw with normal eyes for what they were—superficially pretty, cheaply attractive, innocent of any depth of charm, any lasting appeal.

Only chance had saved him from a blunt offer of marriage to the vivid lady who had just left him. Had Turner waited ten minutes longer they would have been on their way to a license and an alderman! What was it all about? Had he developed, overnight, some obscure form of insanity? Was he going mad?

He pondered the phenomenon steadily, with a growing apprehension. It came to him suddenly that if the brilliant, flashing stenographer found him here when she returned he would lose his balance as easily as before. He dared not trust himself alone with her again. He must avoid that perilous encounter at any price. . . .

He seized his hat and left the office, locking the outer door. Business could take care of itself. He mustn't risk solitude with women until he had regained his self-governance.

III

He rode down in the elevator opposite a pair of pinchbeck flappers—girls who had the cheap, surface glitter one sees in every business-office, pretty, self-sure, insolent girls with shrill, high voices and a tendency to recurrent, mirthless laughter. He was terrified to find himself staring at them with an impartial, inclusive glow of adoration, vaguely meditating self-introduction, declaration. They saved him by departing at the fourth floor; had they come to the rotunda he could not have held the insane impulses in check. As it was, he had a sense of poignant regret when they had vanished, a melancholy pang of loss. It lasted till he reached the news-counter in the lobby. He had a passing acquaintance with the blonde young woman who presided over it; habit stopped him for the ten o'clock "final edition'" of an evening paper. His eyes met hers and again the overpowering surge of emotion drowned him. He stood quite still, staring.

"My God, how beautiful you are!"

He said it slowly, softly. The lady laughed, with a display of very white teeth and lifted a careful, adjusting hand to a complicated coiffure.

"That's what they all say. I kinda like it myself—it cert'nly is chick, ain't it?" She looked over her shoulder and nodded brightly. "No, we ain't got the *Moon* yet, Mist' O'Brien. Yes, ain't it? Sure, I'll save one fer you. . . ."

Other customers claimed her regard. Slowly, as a man draws out of the clutch of an undertow, Catesby toiled away from her. He was genuinely terrified, now. He had gone mad—absolutely crazy. He couldn't even pass a manicure or a telephone-girl—he'd better find a place where he wouldn't see the flutter of a skirt. But where? They were everywhere—there was no refuge—hold on—the club! He lowered his head and hurried from the building. A taxicab lay in wait at the curb. He sprang to its running-board.

"The Gramercy Club—quick!"

He flung himself into the cab and drew down the curtains.

It was a ghastly ride, darkened, facing the terror of insanity. It seemed an eternity before he found himself safely inside the monastic seclusion of the club. Here he breathed more freely, as a present danger gave away to remoter fears. He went up to the lounge, a little recovered. The room was empty except for the recumbent figure of Judson, lazing over a copy of *Punch*. He rang the bell.

"What's the matter? Pretty early for that, isn't it?" Judson regarded him amiably as he swallowed the stiff drink Alphonse made haste to fetch. "You look as if you'd been seeing ghosts, Catesby."

The urge to confidence gripped Catesby. He dropped into a chair at Judson's side and passed a handkerchief across his forehead.

"You've hit—I've been seeing something, at least. Judson, I'm going dippy—I'm right on the edge of insanity. Something's wrong—"

Judson sat up, his manner changing abruptly. Catesby remembered that Judson was a medical man, too indolent and rich to practice. All that remained of his quondam professional status was the title of Doc. But the circumstances warranted confession; he clutched at the straw of Judson's receptive, intent expression. The story of the morning's madnesses tumbled brokenly from his lips. Judson helped with a question or two.

"Well, what does it mean? What's the matter with me? Am I losing my grip or what?

Judson glanced away. "Tell me—have you always lived about at clubs—steered clear of women, as you've been doing since I've known you?"

"Pretty much." Catesby mopped his brow. "I never was interested in 'em—they used to fuss me when I was a kid and I fought shy of 'em. Then, when I got into business I was too busy to bother—that's what scares me now—if I'd been a ladies' man it wouldn't be so damned terrifying—"

"Never been engaged? Never fell in love before? Never—er—kissed them and held hands and that sort of thing?" Judson still looked away.

"Never." Catesby flushed a little. "Never even wanted to kiss one—till today."

Judson laughed softly.

"A very simple case, Catesby. You've never built up any resistance. Most of us begin the hardening process before we're out of knickers. I remember falling desperately in love with my Sunday School teacher when I was twelve. . . . I can make it clearer, perhaps, by a parallel case. Take any disease of civilization—tuberculosis, for instance. We all acquire a high degree of resistance to it by heredity or mild infections. Even weak constitutions can fight it. But a savage, with a perfect physique, goes out like a candle-flame when the thing strikes him, because he's never built up his powers of fighting that particular thing. See? You're roughly in the position of that savage. You've come along this far without realizing that women exist. Now, when you wake to the fact—and that's probably due to some minor physical change in you—you're utterly without means of defense."

Catesby saw the force of the parallel. He mopped his brow again.

"Does that mean that I'm going to lose my head every time I happen to see a reasonably good-looking woman? Am I going to make a snorting ass of myself at my time of life? What's the answer, Judson? I—Lord! I don't want to run around after a woman—I'm comfortable and contented right here—"

Judson chuckled unfeelingly. "I suppose you are, but you might as well give up the idea of holding on to that comfort and content. You're doomed, Catesby. They'll get you. You'll insist on their getting you, in fact."

Catesby rang for another drink.

"I'll fight," he declared. "I'm not going to give in without a struggle. Why—" he shuddered. "I was right on the edge of kidnapping a stenographer this morning. Another minute and I'd have lugged her straight up to City Hall! I'll stay right here in the club—"

"And jump out of the window after some snub-nosed little flapper who chews gum and talks through her nose," finished Judson. "No, Catesby, you can't do it that way. You've got to build up a normal resistance in the normal way, if you want to escape. There's no substitute. You're paying, all at once, for having let your debts accumulate. You'd lived an unnatural existence until you've made yourself unnaturally susceptible. There's only one way to remedy that."

"Well, what is it? I'll do anything—anything!" Catesby remembered the vivid girl of the office with a cold shiver.

"I don't know how you can work it, but you'll have to harden yourself by exposure. We build up resistance to disease by teaching the system tc fight mild cases of it, or of something like it. If you could find a woman who would understand and help—"

"Lord, no!" Catesby shuddered. "I'd be carrying her off in twenty minutes by main force. You don't know me, Judson? I—I want to make poetry about 'em—I want to tell 'em their eyes are like stars and their cheeks like rose-petals and their necks like long, graceful stems that hold up heavenly flowers. I'm crazy, I tell you."

Judson sat up suddenly.

"Catesby, I've got it! I'm going to see you through this—it's the most interesting case I've ever met, and besides—well, a fellow owes something to his old friends. I'm going to ask my wife to help us cure you. She'll understand—she's got a head like a man's and she's as keen a thinker as any diagnostician I ever knew. She'll be interested—I know she will. And you can come out to our place and work up your resistance by seeing her, talking to her, till you're able to look at a pretty manicure with no more than a harmless twinge of curiosity and regret. After all, that's the best that any of us can say. We never quite get over that much of a weakness. We only learn to control it. Do you want to try it?"

Catesby started erect. "Jud, I can't—it's too much. Why, damn it, man, do you realize that the first minute I'm left alone with—with Mrs. Judson I'll be on my knees, begging her to run away with me to Japan or Morocco or—or Atlantic City? You're presupposing a certain amount of decency in me—I haven't got a shred of it! I'll plot to get you out of the way and be making love to your wife before the door closes on you. I'll stoop to any low trick and run any risk—"

"I was keeping that in mind when I made the offer," said Judson, calmly. "We'd be prepared for that—we shouldn't misunderstand it—we'd be forewarned and forearmed, you see. Besides—" he laughed with a slight self-consciousness—"you forget that Mrs. Judson has—has a certain interest in me, which would make her quite immune to such ideas. There'd be no offense in them because we'd all know that you weren't responsible. No, if you care to make the experiment, I'm sure Amy would help—gladly. And I'd like to see whether it wouldn't work

out—I have a professional interest as well as the personal one."

Catesby reflected slowly. After all, why not? Judson was a doctor and must know what he was talking about. His wife—Catesby remembered scraps of club gossip—his wife was a woman of unusually strong character—a kind of Minerva, interested in politics and economics and uplift generally. He had heard her described as an iceberg by displeased gentlemen who had visited at the Judson place on Long Island. Why not? If he didn't do something disaster would assuredly swoop on him; even now he was beginning to contemplate a return to the office in time to welcome the vivid person who had misunderstood him so terribly . . . it was hideous that she should misjudge him—a girl so lovely, so adorable, so pure and innocent and sweet. . . . He caught himself in the midst of this digression and jerked his mind back to the point at issue. He thrust out his hand.

"I'll take you up, Jud. And let me tell you that I'll never forget this! It's the finest thing I've ever heard of—"

Judson shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, a man owes something to his friends. And besides, it's in my line of business. I'll send you a bill that will jolt you out of your gratitude." He glanced at his watch. "We might as well start. Get what you need and I'll order the car."

Half an hour later they were slipping swiftly over the span of the bridge toward the smoke-ridden Brooklyn side of the river. Catesby had a sense of escape, of deliverance. He kept glancing behind him as if apprehensive of pursuit, until they left the straggling suburbs behind them and reached the open country of the island. Then he relaxed a little and leaned back with a long, quivering sigh.

"Judson," he said with conviction, "I've got a hunch that this is going to work. I believe you've hit the mark."

"I shouldn't wonder a bit," said Judson.

He was absorbed in his driving. Catesby thought his voice sounded absent, mechanical.

IV

DINNER was a blend of torture and ecstasy—both exquisite. Amy Judson, tall, with the stateliness of well-proportioned and distributed solidity, contemplated Catesby with a brief, appraising eye and thereafter remembered his presence only at intervals in her narrative of Washington activities.

She was calmly indignant concerning officialdom and its impenetrable ignorance; more actively resentful at the memory of certain rebuffs which she construed as personal slights. Some of her allies had heroically spent a night in jail for the glory of a cause—she was obscurely exultant over this, believing that thereby the final triumph of the emprise must be sped. Catesby listened in a dazed bewilderment, conscious rather of her nearness, the splendid, radiant allure of her being, the deep, resonant glory of her voice, than of the words she spoke and the cerebrations they expressed. Judson listened, nodded, interpolated the expected monosyllable in the pauses which invite it, smiled infrequently at Catesby.

The dinner was excellent, and the house itself charming, but of these gross matters Catesby had no least awareness. He discovered a keen, hot hatred of Judson for obstructing speech by his presence, a sullen impatience at the intrusions of the servants.

Later, however, Judson made way for him.

"You must fight, you know," he said quickly, as they stood close, for a moment, Mrs. Judson inspecting the headlines of the latest editions at the far end of the big, dim library. "Don't give in an inch more than you have to—she'll help you all she can, but you've got to do this for yourself—" he lifted his voice abruptly—"I've got to see McPherson about the Flower Show, Amy. Will you amuse Catesby till I finish?"

"Perhaps Mr. Catesby would enjoy seeing the greenhouses by electric light,"

said Mrs. Judson, absently, intent on the newest outrage.

"Oh, I'd rather stop here, please." Catesby scarcely recognized his voice.

She turned with a slight cloud of annoyance on her fine, intellectual face, as Judson slipped quietly into the hall.

Catesby moved toward her. He felt the sensation of being carried by some foreign agency—as he had felt as the steps of an escalator flattened underfoot and sped him toward the moving belt which sweeps the hypnotized to the platform. She sank on the wide, deep settee before the gentle fire. Somehow he was beside her, his eyes rapt and adoring.

"I'm not fit for company, tonight," she was saying crisply. "I'm too wrapped up in the work I've been doing to think of anything else. You must bear with me if I harp tiresomely on it. You see the Woman's Radical Suffrage Party is doing the big things that the timidity of the conservatives has delayed too long. We know that nothing is gained without a fight and we're fighting—I can't think of anything except those women in that frightful cell—enduring. . . ."

"They're like stars—high, remote, flashing stars that burn for all their coldness—stars that—"

She stopped abruptly, her brows rising. "Who? The martyrs—?"

Catesby shook his head. "Your eyes. I—I can't think of anything except stars—stars against a violet night—infinite spaces—"

"Please—I don't care for elaborate compliment." She spoke curtly. "Where was I? You put me off—oh, yes. Well, Mrs. Hibblewick and Mrs. Pratt and I have a plan to force the stupid, inert politicians to. . . ."

"Your hair makes me think of a fine, black net with a thousand gleaming, twisting fishes tangled in it—a net that has caught a school of star-beams—I—"

"Mr. Catesby! Really—"

"I can't think of anything else—you—you make me dream of curious things—I—I never felt like this till now—I seem to see you standing on a spit of sand, with blue and silver waves kissing your bare feet and a kind wind whipping a fine white garment—and your arms are lifted and in your eyes. . . ."

"I—Fred didn't tell me that you were a poet, Mr. Catesby—"

She laughed uneasily. He could see a pale flush touching her cheek.

"Who wouldn't be a poet—with the sight of you in his eyes and the music of you in his ears and—? It's a blasphemy that you should waste yourself on anything less than love! A glorious woman like you—to think of votes and bills and lobbying! When the Old Gods cast you to stir a man's soul and wake the majesty of love in him—! Amy—Amy—don't you see what's happened to me? Don't you guess that I—that we—oh, how many cycles is it since we loved each other in the Old Desert? Amy, look at me—look at me!"

Slowly she let her eyes meet his. He saw her lips quiver, saw the tremor of her lids.

"Oh, you must not—you must not!"

She seemed to struggle against something stronger than her will. The keen hard lines faded and her face was pallid, rapt, exquisitely touched with longing.

"Go on—" she breathed. "Go on!"

He took her hands in his.

V

THE envelope bore the embossed emblem of the club. Its creamy stiff surface touched Catesby with a kind of reminiscent melancholy, evoking a quick mental image of high-ceiled, quiet, smoke-scented room, of tinkling ice and the sound of low, relaxed laughter of men. He fingered it slowly, a faintly wistful look at the corners of his mouth. Washington was a long way from New York . . . a great painted poster, half-unwound from the sticks which supported it, leaned against the wall.

Russia is free—why not US?
Fight for liberty till
tyranny of Man . . .

Across the table at which he sat a streamer of yellow felt flaunted blue letters W R S P. He stretched a covert hand and flung it stealthily to the floor, his eyes on the erect and massive shoulders of a woman who faced a mirror, her hands lifted to black, lustrous hair. A sigh escaped him, soundlessly.

He tore the envelope. He choked a sharp exclamation in his throat. Judson! Why should Judson write to him! Judson—after everything that had risen between them since that mad experiment which had led—to this? What could the man whom he had wronged, the friend whom he had betrayed, have to say to him? He stared at the single sheet of heavy notepaper, his brows gathered.

Mr. Owen Catesby,
In Account with Frederic Judson, M.D., to Professional Services, $1,000,000.00.

He gasped at the figures. Was Judson trying to frighten him? Was it the preliminary of some absurd law-suit for —what was it they called it? Alienation? What did it mean? A million dollars! He looked again. A final line was scrawled below the rest:

Received Payment, F. J.

Slowly understanding came to Catesby. He rose to his feet as a firm, resonant voice announced that it was time to start. He had reached the door before it struck him that the taunt was written on club paper. The final touch!

"Yes, Amy—coming, dear," he said.

I DO NOT LIKE THE WAY HE ANSWERED

By George Bailey

I DO not like the way he acted at dinner this evening and answered my question.

Though I am aware I lost my waist-line in the distant past, though I admit I have a plump appearance when looked at from any direction, I think he might have been more emphatic in his reply.

For when I asked, "You don't like these skinny chickens—little meat and no wings—do you?"

His reply was a half-hearted "Perhaps."

TRUE love starts with a temperature of 110 and ends in a cold sweat.

FAVORITISM: where a husband shows a preference for his wife.

TO PLEASE PENELOPE

By Garrison K. Rumford

I

THERE are two ways of doing a thing; usually a right way and a wrong way. Where Penelope is concerned, however—

Penelope Parkhill, I'm talking about; Mrs. J. Stocker Parkhill to be quite correct, wife of the well known J. Stocker, idol of Broadway and despair of his family; the man who drove his racing runabout into the front door of that café down at Long Beach, and who conceived the idea of a fox hunt on foot across Forty-second Street, the reynard breaking cover from the Knickerbocker Grill and going to earth in the document room of the Public Library. While the run was short the pace was furious so long as it lasted. And at $25 apiece, not counting, of course, the wear and tear on hunting habits, the meet was undoubtedly a great success, and inexpensive enough.

Why it was that Penelope chose, eventually, to withdraw herself to an apartment on Riverside Drive no one —save myself—quite understood. Some said that J. Stocker beat her, and that she lacked sufficient sense of humor to realize that it was merely an evidence of his superabundance of good spirits; others attributed her action to the rumor that her husband drew heavily on her means for his own support —those little luxuries of life, like foreign roadsters and florist's accounts, which every gentleman requires. The last charge was patently a canard; for the social position J. Stocker had conferred upon her by marriage could not possibly be balanced by mere money—she had been a Blahm, one of the iron Blahms of Birmingham, Alabama.

I give you, now, only the gossip of the town. I myself, and I alone, I think, thoroughly understood Penelope. I knew the real reason for her refusal to share the bed and board of J. Stocker, and her consequent self-deportation to the Drive. At least some months ago I thought that I knew the reason. Now I am sure; and sympathize with J. Stocker. For Penelope is very hard to please.

II

WHEN I first knew the Parkhills they were living, under the benediction of our highly esteemed laws, in the matrimonial state, and the Fifth Avenue mansion. But it was soon after my first meeting that Penelope kicked over the traces, or slid under the wire, or beat the ball, or flew the coop—or whatever the correct, sporting phrase is—and hied herself to her aerie above the bacillary banks of the Hudson, that broad and stately stream which separates the reducing plants of New Jersey from the reducing parlors of New York.

She invited me to call, I remember. Just why I don't know. I had the reputation of understanding women; and, of course, Penelope was pitifully misunderstood. More bitterly misunderstood than any other woman who has ever existed; that she admitted.

At any rate, I called. And had an altogether delightful time.

Naturally artistic I appreciated the aesthetic effects that Penelope's interior decorator had achieved; a symphony in yellow the apartment was, with comple-

mentary colors distinct to each room; the drawing room, yellow and mulberry; the dining room, yellow and ultramarine; the library, yellow and sepia, one bedroom, yellow and mauve; the other, yellow and green-lawn.

Naturally sympathetic, I appreciated Penelope herself, never quite forgetting, of course, the æsthetic delight afforded me by her exquisite taste in clothes. For there was no gainsaying the effectiveness of her costumes, those long, slinky, clinging things in vague pastel shades, that drooped and wreathed themselves about her willowy figure like translucent gossamers such as the naiads must once have worn. She knew how to dress; yes, and the emphasis lent by her garments to the ethereal fragility of her figure was heightened by her hair and the charming delicacy of her features. Her eyes in particular, and her hair, were most unusual; the hair, almost black but with soft tones of gray that lent an ashen hue to the general effect of her coiffure; her eyes, deep gray, but with odd glints far in their depths that recalled nothing so vividly as the sheen from the sunlighted wing of a pheasant.

That first intimate tête-a-tête was not half an hour gone before I realized that I was desperately in love with Penelope. The earth revolved about her, the sun moved at her command.

Followed many meetings, intimate meetings when Penelope and I poured out our hearts over the teacups and sighed sweet sadnesses to the scent of the marigolds that were ever about her. Her very helplessness intrigued me, she was so clinging, so dependent, so wistful. I longed to cherish her, to twine the soft tendrils of her womanhood about the sturdy trunk of my virility. And, at length, opportunity came.

III

SITTING, intimate, above our orange pekoe, entered, one day, that unspeakable husband. Unannounced he had violated the sanctity—of our privacy; abruptly he shattered the fragrant mists of our idyllic uplands, belching into our sacred atmosphere of forbidden pleasure the unmistakable odors of Forbidden Fruit. Roughly, brutally, he demanded my reason for presence, my excuse, even, for existence.

I answered him with, I congratulate myself, just the proper shade of hauteur.

Penelope, trembling, terrified, was silent. And her silence, evidence of her absolute trust and faith in me, fired me with just that spirit of exalted belligerency that should prove the undoing of that miserable interloper.

Briefly, I thrashed him soundly.

Then it was, then, as he lay prostrate, leaking brown gore all over the priceless mulberry of the rug, that I received my first shock.

Instead of hailing me as a savior and preserver Penelope was cooly silent, giving all her attention to the resuscitation of my battered victim. She mopped off his lacerated face with cool towels, she applied great chunks of ice to his brow, she well-nigh asphyxiated him with the aromatic fumes of her smelling salts.

Not, indeed, until he had been propped upon his feet, and steered firmly but gently out of the door did she pay the least attention to me. Even then she displayed not the slightest concern in my badly skinned thumb knuckle. Instead she retired across the room to her gold embroidered divan, and sank listless and apparently impervious into her satin cushioned nest of pillows.

True, for an instant, as I saw her filmy square of lace handkerchief steal stealthily to her eyes, I was filled with the thrilling delusion that my heroism had made upon her the desired impression. Had I not rescued her from ennui, nay, even more, perhaps from bodily injury? Was it not meet that she should look to me as her protector, as her champion of the jousts?

But, instead: "I loathe brutality!" she breathed. "I detest cruelty, Cyril" —the name fastened upon me by fond heritance—.

For a moment she was silent, then

"Never forget yourself again, Cyril, so far as to be guilty of such bestiality."

"But, Penelope," I protested.

"Say nothing, Cyril," she interrupted coldly, "the subject is highly distasteful, not to say revolting, to me."

Overwhelmed, desolated, *bruyant*—of course that doesn't mean anything, but one must have strong, foreign-sounding words to express such an emotion as mine—I departed.

Happily my exile was to be not for long. Within a week I was the glad recipient of a fragrant note, penned upon the best lavender-tinted, Blahm-crested stationery, bidding me to present myself for penance and for the meed of ultimate absolution. In my haste to keep my appointment I was twice halted by police officers and once by an individual who—since an officer is always a gentleman—who, I reiterate could not have been an officer at all, inasmuch as he insisted on escorting me to a low police station. Somewhat delayed by this misadventure though I was, I succeeded in arriving at my shrine not more than ten minutes late. And, despite Penelope's natural chagrin at my slothfulness, I was soon forgiven and again elevated to my former eminence.

So the months passed on. Once more I was Penelope's accepted suitor.

Then came the climax.

It was, I recall, upon one of those charming autumnal days when the whispers of wayward warmth cajole and cozen at the ears of senile Winter. The windows of Penelope's apartment were half open to the savors of sweet Nature, and all the world was at peace. We sat, in the dimness of the rose-tinted twilight, and murmured sweet fragments of our sacred thoughts.

Never had I been so happy, never so subtly sure of attaining my desired dream, a place at the side—or, at the worst, not more than a step to the rear—of Penelope. She, indeed, was in a melting mood. Her words came to my ears like honey and syrup of figs.

When, suddenly, without warning, again he appeared; he, the hated husband.

Penelope uttered a soft, half-smothered cry, soft as the sibilant sigh of an anguished swan.

I, instinctively, rose, ready for combat.

And then I remembered—remembered my bestial brutality of the previous encounter, remembered that a spirit so sweet as Penelope's could not again bear the horrid sight of bloodshed; could not again endure to see such havoc wrought.

The solution came in a flash; even as I stood surveying this miserable miscreant, this fellow who alone stood between me and my heart's desire. There are two ways of doing a thing. I wished to please Penelope: that was my only object. I had gone at that end in the wrong way. I should now seek to attain that ideal by action quite opposite. There was, patently, but one alternative.

I must be well, though bloodlessly, beaten, myself.

All this, I say, passed through my mind with rapidity perternatural to my ordinary mental processes. It was no pleasant alternative, this sacrifice that I must make upon the altar of my adoration. The more so as I looked earnestly at my hated antagonist.

For J. Stocker made no imposing figure. His feeble form, dressed in what he believed to be a tasty suit of red and gray checks, hardly sufficed to bear up under the weight of the padding in his shoulders. His throat, rising in ruminant bulge above his low collar, throbbed franticly as the ball of his Adam's apple rose and fell with the regularity of an hydraulic pump. His face, or rather his nose—for below and above his countenance drifted away into the dim background of the room—was twitchingly prominent, as if it sought forever to dislodge of its own activity some fictitious fly. To be beaten by J. Stocker was destined to be something of an effort, I anticipated. But I was resolved.

Words passed. Harsh words, beneath which the adorable Penelope wilted and withered. I could scarcely restrain myself; and when finally he was reckless enough to call her "ill-advised" I could hold back no longer. With a roar of rage I rushed at his throat.

IV

THE conflict that ensued was titanic. Weighing about a hundred and ninety myself, and something over six feet in height, it was with the greatest difficulty that I was able to keep from falling upon my opponent.

Time and again, as he shook me back and forth, desperately clinging to my shoulders, I feared that I should lose my balance and crush him.

Time and again, as his fists smote against my cheeks and jawbones, I was terrified lest he break his hands and so end the encounter. Once, indeed, I thought that I was quite undone. He had butted me with surprising violence, squarely in the mouth. Inadvertently my teeth broke flash on his temple, just at the edge of his thin blond hair. A drop of blood appeared. Had it not been for my rare presence of mind in keeping my chin firmly fastened over his forehead during all the rest of the battle Penelope would undoubtedly have spied the gore. Now—well—I wish she had.

For, ten minutes later the duel ended. Inadvertently I had staggered too close to the open window. My foot caught in a rug; and, toppling backward, I avalanched out of the window. J. Stocker caught himself in time. And the last thing I remember in my ten-story drop was the glint of his gloating eyes, as he peered out over the sill.

Oh, no. I wasn't killed. Several thoughtful tenants had left out their awnings; and I landed quite comfortably, if abruptly, on the stairs of the area. Being in splendid condition it required but a moment for me to gather my dispersed thoughts. Then, indeed, I was exultant.

Penelope was won. There had been no bloodshed. I had been well beaten.

Assuming severe injury, I lay and waited—waited for the sweet words of love that were to herald my acceptance into her heart, forever.

Came a patter of feet; and the voice of Penelope. Into my consciousness stole the knowledge that she was bending over me. In an instant her arms would be close about me, her fragrant breath in my nostrils; perhaps, perhaps, her lips on mine.

Slowly I opened my eyes. Yes, it was she. Tenderly, very tenderly she leaned over. I felt her cool, white hand on my forehead. I heard her exclamation of glad relief that I was not dead. Her lips were very near.

"Penelope," I dared to whisper, "Penelope, do you love me now?"

"Oh, Cyril," she answered—and in her voice was the catch of a sob—"Oh, Cyril—I thought I did. But now I know—

Ah, bliss! Rapturously I closed my eyes, that, the better, I might hear those precious words. They came.

"I know," she said, "I know—that I have found my true mate. I could never love a man who—could not protect me."

And, desperately, she embraced—J. Stocker.

IF one is polite to a woman, she is bored. If one is indifferent to a woman, she is interested. But if one is studiedly insulting—she is fascinated.

WALL-PAPER

By Owen Hatteras

I

MIKE WIMBLE, like most married men, regarded the wife of his bosom as he did the wall-paper of his room—a thing to be favored with an occasional scrutiny and a vague speculation as to whether it would be worth while changing it. Like most married men his love for her was an inexplicable memory. At times, when in the throes of a rare philosophic mood, Mike was wont to look at her, to observe himself and to ponder how in the name of the multitude of protecting Gods he had ever been juvenile enough to mistake the fleeting, temporary, vague and ridiculous attraction the lady had exercised over him for a grand and eternal passion.

Mike was an author and associate editor of a popular magazine. He considered himself intelligent, cultured and sane, and what is more, he was. At such moments of cruel introspection as mentioned, he became poignantly aware of the fact that he had been tricked—cheated out of some vague heritage of ecstasy by an aberration of his intelligence, a lapse of his culture, an eclipse of his sanity, all of which had occurred when he was twenty-four, and had proposed to Clara Corky, only child of Bill Corky, a coffee salesman who played cribbage every Sunday evening with the elder Wimble. This was a matter of eight years ago.

In the light of developments the strange unfathomable mood which had inspired him to propose matrimony to Bill Corky's child, to protest to her on bended knee that she was the indispensible light of his suffering life, to seek out Bill Corky and argue, expostulate, threaten, cajole him into agreeing to yield up the treasure of his house and to bless them in their union—in the garish illumination of reason, culture and sanity which succeeded the marriage, the dreadful, the inexplicable, impulse seemed to Mike to have been the aboriginal workings of a mind and soul other than his. As time, that great healer, went its dumb way such cogitations grew less frequent with Mike. He lapsed into a state of amiable calm, performing his labors, composing his fables for the magazines, immersing himself in literatures of the past and of the moment.

Like most married men he was unable to sustain any sort of conversation with his wife for over five minutes, except during those ephemeral quarrels which agitate the serenity of the most smoothly routined lives. His ideas, his aspirations, his little daily dreamings he kept unconsciously to himself.

Thus for eight years he had lived in that state of uncommunicative and monotonous intimacy which is regarded as one of the cardinal glories of society.

Toward the end of the eighth year, however, the habit of meditation began to return to Mike Wimble, the old habit of lying awake nights, looking at the dark ceiling and wondering what there was to life, and why the devil he should be doomed because of a slip of the tongue and an eclipse of sanity eight years ago to spend the rest of his days harnessed to a creature in whom he had no interest, for whom he had no affection, with whom he had nothing whatsoever under the entire broad heavens in common.

Such thoughts naturally frightened Mike, and caused him to feel sad and remorseful, to bring home boxes of candy, to brighten up at the following breakfast table and expound the meaning of some item in the morning papers.

But once started the old habit grew. His faculty for pounding out fables seemed to be on the wane, his reputation as a fictioneer gradually came to a standstill and with it he became aware that his name had evolved into one of those syndicate nobodies fit only to capture the vacuous attention of people who ride on trains, who wait in doctors' offices, who tire of playing solitaire.

In the beginning of the ninth year, Mike Wimble's meditations no longer frightened him. His imagination, no longer employed in the evolution of tales, turned itself upon his own life with fascinating results. An illusion overcame him that without Mrs. Wimble life would unfold like some rare exotic. This was succeeded by a second notion that somewhere at large and mournful in the land there waited for him a creature intended by the considerate Gods for his happiness, a lady of astonishing loveliness, of infatuating brilliance, intelligent, cultured, rhapsodic—in short a mate for his soul.

Like most married men Mike began to dream of this suppositious person, to fashion her image in his mind, to indulge in piquant fancies. With her he sailed out upon the purple seas to far countries, toured strange places, walked with her over ground made sacred by the past. The idea grew, and, growing, grew less vague, became more real.

Together they passed through ennobling adventures. Sometimes Mike would have her commit suicide because of love for him, sometimes it would be a suicide pact consummated in a lyric and heroic manner. Often they traveled the mystical deserts the names of which Mike remembered from early geography readings. Often they sat beneath some luxurious tree singing each others' praises, understanding each other, in accord with each others' very pulse beats. Because of his somewhat more than average imagination Mike's dream world, which he shared with the woman he had missed, assumed more intricate proportions than that of the average married man.

Needless to say, Mrs. Wimble found life full of charm and happiness. She loved her husband, doted on his presence, fancied their existence together to be the Utopian blessedness which comes only to the most fortunate and gifted of law-abiding moral citizens. It is doubtful whether a single fear had ever intruded itself in her heart, a single qualm, quiver, foreboding.

Serene in her domestic ambitions, Mrs. Wimble regarded herself as an intelligent, cultured and sane woman who had earned the right to happiness by an unselfish devotion to her husband's weal, a shrewd knowledge of cookery and a cunning way with the tradesmen of the neighborhood.

She considered Mike, her husband, a surpassingly clever person, kept his books in good order, dusted his bookcases faithfully, read his printed fables with a delicious sense of pride (although she sometimes contented herself with merely glancing at the opening paragraphs) and looked forward to a docile, unruffled continuance of all that had been.

Mike was coming home from his office one afternoon in May in the ninth year of his married life, thirty-three years from the day of his birth, when his roving, aimless eye alighted upon a woman who wore a yellow hat, a green striped skirt, a white shirtwaist, a pair of brown oxfords with brown silk stockings to match. The woman's face revealed her to be passed her twenties, amiable, intelligent, cultured, sane. Further, there was a trim shapeliness about her. It was a windy day and just as Mike was passing her (he was at the moment wrapped in visioning himself and his phantom soulmate gliding down some jungle river) her hat blew off and rolled to Mike's feet. Where-

upon Mike picked it up and handed it to her. These are the facts, uncolored, simple.

"Thank you, so much," the lady said, reaching forth for the hat.

" 'sall right," Mike made answer, and in handing over the thing it blew away again.

There was nothing for him to do but give chase.

After a short pursuit he overtook the fleeing bonnet, returned with it again to the amused and somewhat chagrined owner and said,

"Seems to be a rather temperamental hat."

"Thank you, so much," the lady made answer.

An idea struck her, an uncalculating, more or less spontaneous idea—such as it was.

"I ought to have a regular hat chaser along when I go walking," she added.

It being spring, Mike's heart executed a great, an epoch-making leap. Of such remarks are destinies made and unmade.

Blushing, blinded, overcome with confusion, Mike yet managed to stammer out,

"Won't I do? I'm a-an accomplished hat chaser."

II

THUS it began, a delicate curbstone idyll on a spring afternoon, a thing to flick the emotions and no more. It would have ended with the first walk toward the lady's home—she lived five blocks from Mike's domicile—if not for another accidental meeting in a street car returning from work two days later.

During this ride Mike blossomed forth, giving vent to eight years of pent-up epigrams, repeating to the lady of the yellow hat a goodly part of the fascinating conversations he was wont to conduct with the mate of his imaginings.

For her part, the lady confided that her name was Mrs. Higgins, opened her mouth and gurgled with delight to learn that Mike was none other than Michael Wimble, author of the "perfectly wonderful Simon stories," and permitted her new friend to escort her again to her home.

From this point the idyll progressed and expanded. It required hardly a week for Mike to appreciate that the all indulgent gods had finally answered his prayers, that they had sent to him the queen of his dreams, the fairy of his yearnings. Their meetings increased, included a rendezvous at a matinée, a debauch at a soda fountain, a stroll in a park.

During the first of it Mrs. Higgins exhibited a timorous reluctance. She spoke, almost defensively of Jim Higgins, her husband, of his qualities, his kindness. She had been married seven years, their home had always been her shrine.

But under the spell of Mike's eloquence, his drolleries, his ecstasies Mrs. Higgins underwent the fatal change. Her words, at first, calm, meaningless, began to fashion themselves into whimsical repartee. Her manner, at first polite, moral, began to unfold itself into appealing kittenish ardors. Together they toured the Art Institute, paused in front of picture stores, of Japanese shops in Michigan avenue. Mike loaned her books and after her reading of them they would foregather in the park already made familiar to them and discuss with careful, with spontaneous phrases the meanings of life, the vistas of existence.

Mrs. Higgins and the lady of Mike Wimble's dreams gradually became one. Those delicate delights he had known in gliding down imaginary jungle rivers, committing imaginary suicides, touring imaginary deserts were completely effaced. In their place were the more material enthusiasms which these rendezvous with Mrs. Higgins furnished him, the more tangible joys of conversing in the flesh with the phantom of his former yearnings. If there were not the jungle, the desert, the ruins of ancient Greece, there were, on the other hand, the smile which lighted the familiar park, the eyes

which illumined the familiar sun, the voice which sweetened the familiar noises of his life.

The first month resulted in no climaxes. Mike's home life progressed as serenely as ever, more so, perhaps, owing to the heightened interest which his adventure inspired in him towards his general surroundings.

For the first time since he came into the grip of that strange unfathomable mood nine years ago which had betrayed him into proposing matrimony to Clara Corky, Mike felt that delicious activity of the heart at the thought or sight of a woman which goes by the name of love.

But here the comparison ended, in his mind. Here the mood of nine years ago and the exultant disturbance of his senses today parted company. That had been a lapse, an eclipse, a disorder common to unthinking, unselective youth. This was a rhapsodic excitement born of the brain, the soul, the heart as well as the body. In Mrs. Higgins, Mrs. Belle Higgins her full name was, Mike perceived that there were qualities to call forth the finest in a man, to unleash his very soul.

No longer did he lie staring at the darkened ceiling pondering the why and wherefore of a lugubrious existence. No longer the meditations upon the wasteful futility of his days. His dreams formed themselves about the yellow head of Mrs. Higgins, inspired themselves by the blue eyes of that lady.

Already the first delicate tangible joys of their communion were exhausted and Mike's imagination was beginning to leap into mystic futures, to vault into splendid fancies. His appetite began to fail him, his mind to grow disordered. He began to live in dreams. He began to see that Mrs. Higgins was the indispensable light in his suffering life, that without her all—all was darkness.

When these perceptions first overtook him Mike reacted with a mixture of emotions. Clara Corky Wimble loomed before him, a wall of habit, a fortress of insurmountable convention. But gradually Clara Corky vanished, became mist.

And it was at this point in the second month of his communion with Mrs. Higgins that Mike approached the subject in her presence. Mrs. Higgins experienced a spasm of fear at the sound of his passionate outline of events as they might be. She shuddered, swallowed hard, trembled in every fibre of her being and clung to his hand in a thoroughly bewildered and desperate manner.

They were sitting in the park hidden from view by the freshly leafed trees and shrubbery.

"Belle," he began, "don't you see. I need you. You need me. We are one. With you, good God, I could write, write such things as I once dreamed of writing. It is wrong, I admit. A sin, from one point of view. But—but—is it right for us to remain as we are, to live a lie, to—to go on in this terrible humdrum way and cheat ourselves of this wonderful thing? Oh, Belle, I love you."

He seized her other hand and crushed it. He eyed her lips and finally kissed them.

Mrs. Higgins became red, red from her hair to her toes. Shame, wonder, confusion and a peculiarly intruding emotion fell upon her.

"Oh, Michael," she whispered. "I can't . . . I just . . ."

Here Mike interrupted. He started anew. He pointed out to her such fascinating arguments as that she had been in his dreams from the first. He made it clear that he had known her in his soul from the earliest days of his youth.

"My mate," he cried, "my mate! Destined for me! Given to me! I will not permit you to pass out of my life, to leave me again in—in Hell!"

III

THEY arranged for another meeting and further discussion on the following day.

Mike returned to his home treading a fine high strata of air. Through his brain the events of the day whirled in radiant confusion. His heart, expanded almost to a bursting point, could barely contain its divine secret. He eyed Clara Corky Wimble with something approaching tenderness, and by dint of careful concentration, prevented himself from giving some fatal hint of what was brewing.

Mrs. Higgins came to him now wreathed in new splendors. Each gesture, each grimace of hers, each word, each everything appeared to him in a transfiguring light, as the saying goes. High above all women she loomed, in a Parnassian isolation, in a pillar of fire, in a cloud of gold. And he, Mike Wimble, loomed beside her, mate of her soul, companion of her heart, master and slave, one and inseparable, united forever.

They foregathered as appointed on the following day. They spoke to each other in low, vibrant tones. They held hands. Mrs. Higgins, behaving altogether like some unbalanced creature, clung to her adorer, wept, sighed, inquired, pleaded, kissed, choked, burbled, laughed, and to make it more strange, spoke at abrupt intervals of Jim, her husband of seven years whom she was deserting. True, he had always neglected her. She perceived this now. True, he had seldom addressed more than ten words at a time to her. She saw this, too. But, what would he say, feel, do?

Mike answered all her timorous inquiries. Then came the business of practical arrangings. Again Mike rose to the occasion, reeling off train schedules, transportation statistics.

"When?" suddenly asked Mrs. Higgins.

They became silent.

Finally Mike husked,

"Tomorrow."

They parted. On the way home Mrs. Higgins decided not to elope. On the way home Mrs. Higgins perceived that it wasn't in her to elope, that she had been under the spell of a glittering, fascinating personality. On the way home Mike Wimble began to shudder. On the way home Mike Wimble decided eloping was impossible. On the way home Mike Wimble perceived that he had been under the influence of a glittering, fascinating personality.

Inwardly Mike Wimble wept. Being intelligent, cultured, sane, he perceived further that he was not fitted for his destiny, that because of an inherent cowardice, a miserable habitual fear of Mrs. Clara Corky and all she stood for, he would cheat himself out of a heritage that was his. His emotions left him weak and ill. He repaired to his room. Clara Corky attended him with beakers containing physic, with powders pronounced infallible as relievers of headaches. But for his soul she brought him naught, naught but the kindly, patient smile which had taken on for him the qualities of a nightmare of the commonplace during nine years.

Mike Wimble hied him to no train depot the following day. He lay in bed, tossing, tossing in almost actual pain, clinging to the hand of Clara Corky. A fever came upon him and finally the indulgent and comprehending gods sent him sleep. He awoke recovered, peculiarly recovered. At the breakfast table he expounded earnestly on the meaning of an item in the papers. And as he left his home he vowed to himself he would make amends—he would return with a box of candy.

As for Mrs. Belle Higgins, what was Mike's fate was in a measure hers. Jim Higgins came home the evening of the big pact to find the wife of his bosom strangely disturbed. He eyed her casually. He wondered what in Hell ailed her—if anything could possibly ail such a torpid, humdrum creature as was Mrs. Higgins.

Jim Higgins, like most married men, regarded the wife of his bosom as he did the wall paper of his room, things to be favored with an occasional scrutiny and a vague speculation as to whether it would be worth while chan-

ging them. Like most married men his love for her was an inexplicable memory.

At times when in the throes of a rare philosophic mood Jim was wont to look at her, to observe himself, and to ponder how in the name of the multitude of protecting gods he had ever been juvenile enough to mistake the fleeting, temporary, vague and ridiculous attractions the lady had exercised over him for a grand and eternal passion.

Jim was a salesman for a postcard firm. He considered himself intelligent, cultured and sane, and what is more, he was! At such moments of cruel introspection as mentioned, he became poignantly aware of the fact that he had been tricked, cheated out of some vague heritage of beauty by an aberration of his intelligence, a lapse of his culture, an eclipse of his sanity, all of which had occurred when he was twenty-three and had proposed to Belle Jolson, only child of Sam Jolson, a cabinet-maker who played pinochle every Sunday evening with the elder Higgins. . . .

THE GIRL I LOVE

By John Farwell

THE girl I love must have the scarlet lips of Validé, the daughter of the Governor of Teheran, whom I saw for an instant when the wind whipped aside her veil.

The girl I love must have the clear gray eyes of Aileen McCarthy, whom I once saw cutting peat near Ballyhanninch.

The girl I love must have a smile as ready and mischievous as that of Hetty, who brought home the washing when I lived for a time in Brooklyn.

The girl I love must have teeth as perfect as those of Martha, my colored cook.

The girl I love must have the perfect profile of a girl I glimpsed yesterday through a car-window as the subway train pulled out of a station.

WOMEN delude us, lie to us, cheat us, deceive us, flatter us, lead us into pitfalls, rob us of our belief in our fellow men and sometimes even make us doubt our God. For these things we can forgive them. But then they laugh at us! And that is unforgivable.

POLITICIAN: a fellow who aids in making laws and then laughs at those who keep them.

THE KING OF SORROWS

By John McClure

IN a palace white as sunlight in a green and glorious garden in the land of Ozz dwelt the king of sorrows. It was not that he wept, for weep he never did. He had nothing to grieve for. He merely did not smile. Since he was a princely infant, gurgling upon his mother's lap, no smile had crossed his face. His was a weary and sorrowful countenance, bleak as winter. And the counselors pondered and the peasants in the fields were sad, because their king was dreary.

They had given him everything. As he grew older his every wish had found fulfillment. And now, a full-grown king in Ozz, as he sat in his palace white as sunlight, everything in the world was his. Musicians played for him upon unusual instruments, wind and string; eunuchs with long-handled elaborate fans, fringed with peacock feathers and golden wire, fanned breezes for his face; dancing girls of white and brown danced for his pleasure when he willed. He had bursting coffers of rubies and diamond, turquoise and emeralds, topaz and pearls, intermingled, to dip his hands in for delight. Yet he did not smile.

"Surely," said the gray counselors, "he should be merry. These marble halls should echo with laughter. Everything in the world is his."

Yet his face was bleak as winter. And the simple folk in the fields, who know nothing, said:

"There is a doom upon him. He will not smile."

To the toothless and wrinkled Bharbar, the one philosopher in Ozz, the king discoursed as follows, wisely:

"Life is vain. We are born. We die. We wish, and our petty wishes are fulfilled. We have our little toys for the space of a summer's day. And then? What has it profited us? Life is vain."

They had brought him from the village of Ghaz a fool for jester, a ribald and jolly clown. He was ugly and lean, and his back was humped like a camel's. But his wit was nimble. He was called Trooloolin. And to amuse the king, who would not be amused, he jested and railed and capered without end. Yet would the king not smile. He gazed at Trooloolin with queer bored eyes. There was no joy in him.

Trooloolin, now, had brought with him from Ghaz a dainty and graceful woman, consort for his gray hours when he put aside the mask of fool. She was fair, yet not by half so fair as many of the white and brown and olive maidens who danced to the music of dulcimers before the king. And though the fool was hideous and despised, she loved him dearly.

And it came about that when the king saw her for the first time, he was by a quirk of chance smitten with abrupt desire. He called her to him.

"You shall give up the fool," he said, "and shall belong to me."

The woman looked into his eyes calmly.

"I could not," she said.

"And why?"

"I love Trooloolin."

The king shook his head in a bored and dreary way.

"I can force you," he said. "Do not you know that?"

But at the horror and fear that

sprang into sight in her wide eyes, he added in a softer voice:

"Yet I shall not. Your will is free. You would prefer the clown?"

She looked into his eyes calmly as ever.

"I should prefer the clown."

The king dismissed her.

And for a long interval he sat on his cushions, fanned by the peacock fans, dreaming. She would prefer the clown. That was beyond belief. He called for musicians and listened to the strumming of stringed instruments until dusk.

Next day again he called the woman before him. That day she seemed more beautiful than any. The king, as he studied her face, felt the desire of the moth for the moon, a high and beautiful longing. He set before her three coffers of gems, rich and rare, that twinkled and gleamed. He had the eunuchs fetch before her robes of velvet and silk, trailing garments of cloth of gold.

"These shall be yours," he said.

She shook her head.

"I do not want them."

He called before her forty slaves from Nubia and Thrace.

"These shall be yours," he said, "to serve you day and night."

She shook her head.

Then the king scowled.

"Fetch me the fool," he commanded.

And Trooloolin, the fool, came and stood beside the throne, somewhat afraid. And there were the three of them face to face.

"Look," said the king. "He is a monster. His back is bent, his face is hideous. He is the laughing stock of Ghaz and the despised of the palace. He is a monster."

The woman looked at the fool for a long moment.

"And I?" said the king.

She turned her gaze on him. There could be no doubt he was handsome. His body was firm and strong and perfect. His face was like a statue's, pure and clear in feature. The face of Trooloolin was a horrible and startling grimace, half leer, half laugh. But the face of the king was a sober and stately picture of kingly assurance.

"Look," he said. "Your will is free."

She looked long.

"I want you," he continued, "as I have wanted nothing else in the world. But your will is free. I give you a palace with gardens, jewels and gems to wear, robes of rainbow tint, slaves and immeasurable gold. I am a king. He gives you a pallet of straw in the scullery; no gold, no raiment. He is a fool and monster."

The woman looked long.

"I should prefer the fool."

The king stared. A queer shadow crossed his eyes.

"Go," he said. "Your will is free. And you, Trooloolin, son of a monkey, go! And return no more. . . ."

For seven days the king gloomed in the palace and would not eat. He sat on his velvet cushions, listening to stringed instruments, pondering and dreaming. None approached him save the musicians. The gray counselors gathered at the ends of corridors and muttered together. Those who could, deserted the palace. The halls echoed only to the music of instruments—for seven days.

Then, at twilight—it was the hour when Trooloolin and the woman, wandering together, would be seeking shelter for rest and sleep—the gray counselors, clustered together at the end of a corridor in solemn conversation, were startled and amazed. From the central crown-chamber came a sudden sound that echoed new and strange from gallery to gallery of the palace.

"What?" cried the counselors. "Truly?"

It was hilarious laughter.

And now the peasants that plow the fields in the land of Ozz tell each other and strangers of the jolly king they have, the rare man at a jest, who has laughed for forty years.

TROU-LE-SOLEIL

By E. G. Perrier

MET Mme. Quidam, gais et contents, comme dit la chanson, s'en vont vers la petite villégiature traditionnelle.

Cette idée là leur est venue, il y a huit jours à peine, en lisant, dans leur journal, l'annonce d'une plage de rêve, qu'un huluberlu baptisa *Trou-le-Soleil.*

Trou-le-Soleil! En voyant ce nom, en lettres longues d'une aune, flamboyer à la huitème page du quotidien, Mme Quidam s'est sentie prise d'un éblouissement.

Elle se croyait déjà transportée dans un paysage de lumière, avec des rayons partout, près d'une mer tiède où l'on peut s'ébrouer à l'aise et respirer à pleins poumons la bonne chaleur des soirs d'été! . . . Elle s'imaginait ce trou là perché sur une falaise, parmi des bouquets d'arbres et des massifs de résédas: tout en bas, la plage étalait son manteau d'or, pailleté d'étincelles, et c'était un petit coin tranquille, où l'on n'entendait guère que la brise et la lame, où de petites choses blanches remuaient a l'horizon, si imprécises et si lointaines, qu'on n'aurait su dire si c'étaient des voiles qui passaient ou des mouettes qui prenaient leur volée! . . .

O le ravissant spectacle et le bienheureux séjour!

Et Mme. Quidam, âme romanesque, avait incontinent fait ses malles Toute sa garde-robe d'été y fut entassée: les tulles et les linons d'abord, puis les ombrelles aux couleurs claires, et les panamas aux formes cascadeuses, effrontément légers.

—"Pourvu, au moins,"—pensaitelle, —"que tout cela ne soit pas encore trop chaud! . . ."

Et, toute souriante, à la perspective du beau soleil qu'on allait surprendre, là bas, en pleine fête, Mme. Quidam se trémoussait et battait des mains comme une jouvencelle:

—"Va t-on assez s'en donner du bon temps! . . ."

Oh oui! on s'en est donné du bon temps!

D'abord ce Trou-le-Soleil est encore plus charmant que Mme. Quidam ne se l'était imaginé. Figurez-vous trois bicoques sans toits ni fenêtres, perchées au bord d'un gouffre. En se penchant très fort on aperçoit un bout de plage doré comme un gâteau des rois: qu'il ferait bon s'y baigner ou courir sur les galets, le filet à la main! Hélas! la falaise est haute et personne n'y peut descendre!

Et puis, le temps s est mis de la fête. Le premier jour, un petit vent du nord, soufflant en rafales, a balayé le rocher: en un clin d'œil, les trois bicoques sans toits ni fenêtres, chevauchant sur leurs assises, ont baisé la terre! Ensuite, la pluie est venue, une petite pluie de rien du tout, qui a changé la plaine en lac et les ruisseaux en jolis torrents frangés d'écume.

Charmant pays! charmante saison! Les linons et les ombrelles dorment au fond des malles du sommeil des justes. Les panamas, eux-mêmes, n'ont pas daigné sortir de leurs cartons. Mais n'importe: on est allé à Trou-le-Soleil!

Et il faut entendre M. et Mme. Quidam, quand ils parlent de leur villégiature:

—"Ah mon cher, un paradis! un vrai paradis des oiseaux! Seulement, n'y allez pas: c'est le diable pour s'y loger!"

LE REVE

By Georges Beziat

COMME l'ombre descend pour venir sur la terre,
Il plane dans les airs avant de se poser,
Va dans les galetas, abris de la misère,
S'allonge auprès des gueux, qu'il endort d'un baiser.

Au bois tout scintillant de la clarté lunaire,
Du poète rêveur, pour le diviniser,
Il caresse le front, lui donne la chimère
Que de sublimes vers sauront poétiser.

Du palais au taudis, dans sa munificence,
Du plus riche au plus pauvre, il porte l'espérance.
Et, pour suivre le vol du sêve qui s'enfuit,

Les yeux émerveillés soulèveront leurs voiles,
Comme s'ouvre, le soir, pour sourire aux étoiles,
La Belle des Jardins qui parfume la nuit.

FULFILLMENT

By Hortense Flexner

SOME dusk the door I strive against shall give
And I shall see the garden veiled in gray,
Still as the image I have made to live,
And fought for with bare hands, the long mad day.

I shall go in to frail flowers gently blown,
White blossomed trees and paths of healing sands,
I shall go in and I shall take my own,
A stranger with unsightly bleeding hands!

ATTRACTIVENESS, in women, is the art of being out of reach.

A CRITICAL STUDY OF NOTHING

By George Jean Nathan

MR. ERNEST NEWMAN, brought by vocational ordinances to review the sawings and mewlings of the heterogeneous catgut scrapers and contraband philomels who every other night were posturing themselves before London audiences as musicians and singers, became one day so riled at the whole business that he publicly announced he would no longer attend any performances save those of artists who had made a reputation. After a double fortnight of unremitting theater attendance in New York—a period during which I have nightly been spectator at the performances of authors, actors and managers who have made reputations—I am of a mind to announce that I will no longer attend any performances save those of authors, actors and managers who have not made a reputation.

To the making of a reputation in New York, everything would seem to be essential but talent. One is so surrounded in the theater with famous playwrights, famous actors and famous producers—all more or less first-rate eighth-rate men—that the occasional glimpsing of an utterly unknown, utterly unidentified, intruder bursts upon the vision with a sensation as agreeable esthetically as the sudden spectacle, on a dark, gloomy, rainy day in Spring, of a young woman in a soft white dress with a pink flower on her hat. It is, in no small degree, to such newcomers that the critic of the theater looks for stimulation and cheer. For years the critic has watched with leaden eye and numbed brain-pan the uninspired antics of so endless a noctambulation of celebrated authorlets and anointed dudelers that his hope is ever for the new unknown, for the writer who has never composed a play that has run five hundred nights on Broadway, for the actor whose name has never contributed to a theater program the appearance of the first page of the *Evening Journal*, for the producer who has never been compared in the ebullient newspapers to Reinhardt or Stanislavsky or Adolph Appia. He waits patiently through a dozen plays by famous dramatists of Broadway for a play by some unknown Edward Massey, through a dozen performances by famous actors of Broadway for the performance of some unknown Opal Cooper, through a dozen productions by famous producers of Broadway for a production like that of "The Poor Fool" by some unknown amateur out of Washington Square. The fame of the American theater gives us dramas by Jane Cowl and Otto Hauerbach, acting like that of Robert Edeson and Holbrook Blinn, productions like those of "Upstairs and Down" and "Daybreak." The obscurity of the American theater gives us plays by Tom Barry, acting like that of the highly adroit amateur at the Neighbourhood Playhouse, productions like those of the beginner Hopkins' "Poor Little Rich Girl" and the beginner Williams' "Justice" and the beginner Kugel's "Old Lady 31."

In any one theatrical season in New York, it is doubtful if there are presented, out of the two hundred or so annual productions, more than four or five at most that are prosperous in the amusement of a man tutored to a point of skepticism that hiccoughs may be stopped by counting slowly up to one

hundred. For the major part, the plays presented are melodramas exhibiting the news that a man's better nature plus a church-organ will inevitably triumph over his impulse to short-change the cash register; librettos discovering the Atellan juices in the conceit that married Frenchmen always sneak away from their wives on the night of the Quat'-z-Arts ball and that the wives, accompanied by their maids, invariably track after them and make them jealous by flirting with Raoul, the huzzar; and problem dramas demonstrating that every time a married woman is on the point of embarking on the *Maurentic* with her lover she is at the last moment dissuaded from her purpose by the falling ill of her baby boy. Nowhere, not even in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, may one encounter so scintillating an array of mediocrity promulgated in so lofty and pretentious a manner. But—"Have success," wrote Edouard Pailleron, "and there shall always be fools to say that you have talent." And so it has come about that the theater, as we of the American today know it, is a great savanna of successful business men who are mistaken for and hailed as talented producers and successful showmakers and facemakers who are mistaken for and hailed respectively as talented dramatists and actors.

This condition of affairs is, of course, quickly traceable to the radiant gullibility of us Americans, in the theater probably as nowhere else. No worm-medicine vendor, exhorting the cross-road yokel with his charmed philtre, had ever so simple a constituency. Let some Macdonald Hastings come along with direct transcripts from the speculations of Rochefoucauld which he places into play form and calls "The New Sin" and by the next sunrise the almanacs are rich in praise of a famous new philosopher dramatist. Let some A. E. Thomas appear with an unacknowledged counterpart of the French play, "Son Père," which he announces as a new and original comedy called "The Rainbow," and for months afterward we hear paternosters to the famous new American comedy writer. Let some clever showman like the Frederic Thompson that was, a man who in his day understood well this native gullibility and shrewdly catered to it, have his press-agent announce that he was so deep a believer in verisimilitude that he actually maneuvered the bunch-lights in the wings in such wise that the scenic trees would cast changing shadows as in the actual sunlight, and from the one end of the boulevard to the other spreads the awe. And once the Broadway species of fame, the Broadway species of reputation, fastens itself upon a person of the theater, it clings like a leech to him, self-confirmed and irremovable. The foundation for this fame, this reputation, matters not. It may be intrinsically little more than a curl, as in the case of some Della Fox; or little more than a rumor that the peculiar coiffure is designed to hide missing ears, as in the case of some Cléo de Mérode; or little more than a pair of aphrodisiacal eyes or pink pajamas or sightly limbs. Yet fame proceeds from the wake of each, a fame that overshadows mere genuine talent, mere authentic skill.

Thus, the fame of Mary Anderson sprang less from her considerable ability as an actress than from her reputation for being a virtuous woman; the fame of Mrs. James Brown Potter less from her talent than from her spectacular matrimonial alliance with an affluent and tony New Yorker; the fame of Richard Mansfield less from his fine performances upon the stage than from the tales of his temperamental didoes in the wings; and the fame of William Gillette less from his unmistakable dexterity in the fashioning of adroit farce and melodrama than from the report that he had consumption and took long walks at two a. m. in the solitude of Central Park. And what was true yesterday is even more true today. Idiosyncrasy and talent are as often confounded as monetary success and talent. Hang the stage with strips of tar-paper and hang the strips of tar-paper with small slices of Salami and you are

hailed a great innovator in the matter of scenic embellishment. Illuminate brightly with numerous baby spotlights the faces of the actors in a scene calling for a pitch dark dungeon and you are celebrated as a master producer. Take a trifle longer over your make-up box and cuckoo the performance of Irving in "Waterloo" and you are chaired as a magnificent actor.

But, slowly, the young idea is creeping into the theater. And, slowly, the old frauds, and the way of estimating them, are being backed out of the stage door. Not that youth, and the changes that youth inevitably bring with it, are automatically ever for the better. But this youth that is coming into the American playhouse has about it a pleasant air, and one that augurs well. It is slowly giving us new dramatists of ability in the place of the famous charlatans we have come to know; it is gradually giving us new producers of skill and vision and education in the place of the celebrated Philistines. And it is quite possible that in time—it may be ten years, it may be twenty—it will give us also, out of its better labours, a new and a finer audience in the place of the present herd of hallelujahing songwriters, motion picture actors and Broadway bounders whose illiterate voice is the voice of the illiterate audience whose voice in turn is the illiterate voice of our native theater.

II

EXCELLENT examples of the sort of thing one encounters nightly in the theaters of New York are such exhibits as "Eyes of Youth," "The Pawn," "Lucky O'Shea," "De Luxe Annie," "This Way Out," "The Country Cousin" and "Polly with a Past," all more or less recently unveiled to the metropolitan gaze. A panorama of triviality in the entire bulk of which there is no instance of character drawing one-half so good as even that of the beau in the music show "Maytime," no instance of humour even so amusing as the old joke printed in the programs they pass out to you at these plays, in which a teacher asks one of her pupils to tell America's cotton exports for any one year, and in which the pupil replies, "1492. None."

"Eyes of Youth," for example, has for its theme a young woman's incertitude as to which of her several suitors it were best for her to marry, whether the one who holds out promise of a great career, whether the one who holds out a life of luxury, whether the one who offers only love. In this crisis appears a Yogi, who offers to point out the future she would have with each man; the resulting episodes constituting the evening's divertissement. What the play was in its original form, as written by Mr. Charles Guernon, I haven't the faintest idea. But it remains that a fixer was called in in the person of the famous Mr. Max Marcin, and that this fixer's business was the rewriting of the episodes in which the heroine beheld a visualization of her destinies. And how did the fixer rewrite these episodes and make of the play a something more logical than it seemed to its sponsors in its original form to be? He took a couple of acts out of a play called "Her Market Value," which he had done in collaboration with the famous Mr. Willard Mack a year before, which had failed promptly when produced in Chicago, and which had as much relation to the theme of "Eyes of Youth" as a ninth cousin, and inserted these relevant pieces of dramatic literature into the play to serve as so many glimpses of the lady's future life. Of such subtle carpentry is the drama of the Broadway stage. The manuscript aims further at a literary flavour through the periodic employment of such select, if cryptic, phraseology as "aspiring in the spirit."

"The Pawn," a play exhibiting the alleged Japanese cabals against the United States, serves to bring to our notice once again the famous bad actor, Mr. Walker Whiteside. This gentleman is in the habit of smearing a quantity of yellow grease paint on his face, making gestures like Ruth St. Denis and attaching a pair of O'Sullivan's

rubber heels to his shoes and thereupon labouring under the impression that he is depicting a suave Oriental. The ridiculousness of Mr. Whiteside's characterization is automatically exposed by Mr. Whiteside himself through his engagement for his supporting company of a half-dozen real Japanese whose deportment and speech emphasize the burlesque tactics of their overlord. The play in which this famous actor shows himself is a tin-pot melodrama which, had it been submitted to such a producer as Hopkins or Williams or Ames, would doubtless have been consigned summarily to the nearest *crachoir*.

"De Luxe Annie" is based on a famous *Saturday Evening Post* serial story by Mr. Scammon Lockwood. It is what is known in the theatrical argot as a trick play. As is well known, the purpose of a trick play is to outwit (1) its characters and (2) its audience. By this standard, "De Luxe Annie" is a superfine trick play, for its author not only outwitted its characters and its audience, but also outwitted Mr. Arthur Hammerstein into producing it. Mr. A. H. Woods, to whom the play had been submitted originally, attended the services on the opening night and remarked that it always gave him a glow of pleasure to spend two dollars to observe how he had saved several thousands. The play is clumsily constructed. What is currently its third act should obviously be its first, or expository, act. The second act, as it stands, leaves the story at the beginning of the next act almost exactly where it left off at the conclusion of the first. Miss Jane Grey acquits herself creditably in the name part.

"Lucky O'Shea" is a pre-Andrew Mack composition by the famous Theodore Burt Sayre, in which the Irishman is presented as the conventional amalgam of three Johns—McCormack, L. Sullivan and Barleycorn. "This Way Out" is Mr. Frank Craven's dramatization of a famous Munsey story and retails the sort of fable that comes into the SMART SET offices in every mail and that drives Mencken, who has to weed out the stuff, foaming and barking, to the nearest pub. The promise of Craven's unusual little play, "Too Many Cooks," is nowhere realized in the treatment of the present manuscript. "A Tailor-Made Man" is an Americanization of Dregely's "The Well-Fitting Dress Coat," regarding which my august confrère, Corbin, of the *Times*, under the belief that the adaptation was from the German, entertained his pupils with a solemn discourse on the relation of the play's theme to the war lust of the Boche nation. The touch of the fertile George M. Cohan is observable in the adaptation, which is credited to Mr. H. J. Smith, and the farce provides lively, if at no point unfamiliar, amusement.

"The Country Cousin" is from the hands of the Messrs. Booth Tarkington and Julian Street, both also members of the Famous Club, but men who have, nevertheless, done considerable good writing. Yet there is, in this collaborative effort for the stage, not so much as a flicker of the high merit of the one's "Penrod" nor a glimmer of the sharp humour of the other's "Shipbored." What these gentlemen have done is simply to take the formula of the William Hodge play, put skirts on Mr. Hodge and pit the reincarnation with its familiar schedule of proletarian homilies against the familiar schedule of effete aristocratic vices, to the familiar eventual rout of the latter. The procedure, save for an occasional amusing line of dialogue, is cut and dried and is at all moments as obvious as a toupée in the sunlight. One looks for work vastly better than this from such writers. Does a man like Tarkington fail to meet the standard rightfully expected of him when he composes for the theater because, like so many other writers of ability, he has come to view writing for the American theater as something akin to going off on the loose, taking a ride on a county-fair carousel, or visiting a bagnio? One can understand thoroughly the Tarkington view, if this be it. As a matter of fact, it is the view held by Shaw. But Shaw has

the sagacity to realize that, in order to do the dissipation up properly, to fool the onlookers, one must don a top hat and pretend to be very sober. Tarkington, in his theatrical writings, makes the mistake of staggering. The play is moderately well acted, though I can scarcely find it in me to concur in my colleagues' opinion that the selection of an English actress to play the part of the Ohio peasant was a master stroke.

"Polly with a Past" gives one the impression of an amateur play professionally mounted. The work of the Messrs. George Middleton and Guy Bolton, it is the sort of high-school commencement piece in which the pet girl pupil who has the main part climbs on the piano, drapes the piano cover about her and puts the lamp-shade on her head, so mimicking a lady of fashion; in which the two boy pupils who play the waggish bachelors surreptitiously shake each other by the hand whenever they have negotiated some particularly happy *coup;* and in which the lads who are playing the men's parts express joviality by slapping one another every few minutes on the back. That the accomplished Mr. Belasco should continue to exercise his energies in such simple and artistically fruitless directions is a source of never-failing wonderment to those of his better friends among the American critics who hope, with the production of each such play, that the next curtain's rise in his playhouse will disclose something adult, something worth the attention of his meticulous and praiseworthy care, something written by someone who has something to write about. But once more such an exhibition as "Polly with a Past" pricks the bubble of trust. Like so many Belasco productions that have preceded it, so many sedulously staged nothings, it repeats in one the feeling that one so regularly takes away from the Belasco Theater, the feeling of having been present at a very bad dinner very well served.

Mr. Belasco's more recent stratagem would seem to be an effort to woo the public by casting old situations with young actors. In this wise, he doubtless figures out his so-called "plays of youth." The present play is skilfully interpreted, especially in the instance of Miss Claire, whom Mr. Belasco has recruited from the musical comedy stage, and in the further instance of Mr. Cyril Scott, a proficient comique, and Mr. Robert Fischer, a uniformly first-rate actor; and the staging is, in the main, polite and polished—though in no direction the equal of Mr. Hopkins' staging of the two Kummer comedies—yet one leaves the theater with much the same feeling that one has when he leaves for Cherbourg without breakfast.

"The Masquerader," made from the Katherine Cecil Thurston best seller, is a good job of its sort and should meet thoroughly the taste of persons who admire the kind of melodrama in which no one ever dies save in a green light. Artistically, the exhibit falls distinctly less under the head of drama than under the head of convulsion, but since it postures no grander pretence it may be accepted for its face values, and these face values are doubtless of a sharp potentiality in so far as is concerned the inflammation of the cockney emotion. These protean plays, from "Jekyll and Hyde" to "Le Procureur Hallers," from "The Face in the Moonlight" to "Zenda" and "Rupert of Hentzau," are generally successful in kneading the popular theater audience. French and German audiences delight in them equally with our own. Mr. Guy Bates Post has the double role and presents an effective melodramatic performance.

III

By way of interlude, a word or so on the recent music shows. The best is "Maytime," an adaptation of the Continental "As Once Upon a Time in May," and the best in "Maytime" is its second act, an act possessing what is probably the nicest flavour of pathetic distance revealed in a musical comedy since the last act of "The Blue Paradise." "Leave It to Jane" en-

joys George Ade's excellent "College Widow" as the basis of its book and, despite the absence of performers of attractive personality and a deletion of much of Ade's unapproachable humour, offers some diversion. "Good Night Paul" is common stuff, vulgarly written and vulgarly played. The libretto hinges upon the musty *passe-temps* of the opulent uncle from Brazil who desires his nephew to take a wife, of the unexpected arrival of the ancient, of the palming off of the nearest houri as the wife, of the antics of the couple to avoid the same nocturnal couch, etc., etc. The fable of a thousand *opera* yawning in the wake of "Mary's Ankle." The tunes embellishing the sprightly adage are of the species in which the cymbals and bass-drum play leading parts, and the lyrics accompanying the absence of music have chiefly to do with the adventures of an Irish lady in Hawaii, with the news that it is love that makes the world go round, with the perfume of dreams, and apposable inspirations. "Rambler Rose" brings back both the attractive Sanderson and memories of the kind of musical comedy that was popular in the era that followed just after "Clover," "Captain Fracasse," "La Falote," "The Pearl of Peking" and such. It is a thing of artists' studios in Paris; of lyrics urging one to come along to Bohemia where all is happy and free; of masked balls to which the entire cast goes disguised as gipsies; of jokes about none but the brave deserving the fair and none but the brave being able to live with them; of bold French actresses who sit on tables, drink champagne and steal the handsome leading man's affections from the innocent little soubrette convent-girl; of songs to the photograph of the beloved, sung in a pink light; of chorus numbers in which the chorus men sit on chairs, and, during the course of the song, get up, kneel on the chairs and alternately take off their straw hats to the lady singer and wave their handkerchiefs at her. But over these comrades of our undergraduate days the attractiveness of the Sanderson and the rough humours of her colleague, Mr. Cawthorn, in the present instance triumph sufficiently to make of the evening an easy relaxation. This Miss Sanderson is the one woman on our musical comedy platform whose simulation of flapper innocence is contrived with enough adroitness to cajole the cynic spectator. My experienced confrère, M. Lawrence Reamer, of *Le Soleil*, declaims vociferously, like a true bachelor, that he is unconvinced by the lady's baby-blue stratagems and that they fail to move him; but the truth of the matter is that, over the after-the-performance lemonade, one detects in the fellow something of a sigh, something of a wistful look, that were not there before.

IV

THE three—and the only—dramatic presentations up to the moment of the present chronicle that have been, and are, worth the attention of such persons as are interested in the better things of the theater are the Arthur Hopkins production of "The Deluge" (already in the storehouse), the A. H. Woods production of the exceedingly amusing satirical character farce, "Business Before Pleasure," and now Mr. George Broadhurst's adaptation of Imré Földes' Hungarian manuscript, known locally as "Over the 'Phone." This latter is not only the best thing Mr. Broadhurst, directly or indirectly, has contributed to the American theater in many, many years—if not, indeed, the best thing he has ever contributed—but it is at the same time intrinsically a farce-comedy of light amour so frequently shrewd and observing that, in one of its scenes at least, it demonstrates to American audiences anew the genuine, and too little elsewhere equalled, wit of the theater of Budapest. Suspicions of the westward Schnitzler, touches of Molnar, traces of Sil Vara, play peekaboo through the manuscript, and if, in good truth, there is no poverty of arid spaces, if here and there an intrusion of a bit

of vulgar vaudevillism has been permitted by the adaptor, the thing as a whole is yet so very far above the average farce-comedy of the New York stage that one may vehemently urge its virtues upon all such theatergoers as prefer a sharp appraisal of the male heart affected by amatory *cocci* to the conventional theatrical appraisal that begins and ends in the declaration that the beloved's teeth are like pearls.

There seems to be a disposition on the part of some of the newspaper reviewers to take Mr. Broadhurst to task for having tinkered with the original in such wise that certain of the sex scenes have, in the adaptation, lost much of their clarity. This, however, is ever unavoidable when a Continental manuscript of this sort is made ready for the American stage. Were the adaptor to leave the scenes as they are, the first to be outraged and the first to descend upon him with their Puritanic billies would be these same protesting reviewers. The local stage is not yet ready for such good Continental farce-comedy in its virginal state. The adaptor, often against his will and taste, must spoil much of such a play before he dare exhibit it. If you doubt it, try presenting "Le Rubicon" just as it stands. Or "La Bienfaitrice." Or Schnitzler's "Reigen." Or Wedekind's "In Full Cry." Or "The Little Prince," which achieved so considerable a success on the Continent. Nevertheless, it is something of a pity that Mr. Broadhurst found himself compelled to alter the jolly spirit of the original manuscript's ending. But this, as I have said, is doubtless less Mr. Broadhurst's fault than the fault of the audience which it was necessary he bear in mind when making the American version. The change of the young *sabreur* of the original to the middle-aged artist of the Broadhurst script, however, improves the play. Mr. Henry Kolker fits into the leading role snugly. His performance is excellent. The reviewers' objection that the role should be played by a younger and prettier fellow merely indicates again what would seem to be the desire of these gentlemen to reduce the depictment of all roles of a particular kind—and all groups of roles —to so many rubber stamps.

Alexander Hamilton is the latest historical figure to add Mr. George Arliss to his gallery of impersonations. The play is called "Hamilton," and contains admirable dramatic material which, however, has not been realized by the play-makers. The manuscript is faint stuff. Mr. Arliss, in the central role, makes Hamilton look and act very much like Mr. Ferdinand Gottschalk.

"The Scrap of Paper," by Mr. Owen Davis, out of a periodical *conte*, is the débris of out-dated melodrama.

"The Family Exit," by Mr. Lawrence Langner, reveals a lively wit and a lively satirical point of view, but also an immature sense of form. The play deals ironically with the American attitude toward morals and discloses in its initial act an excellent approach which is thereafter dissipated in prolixity and circumlocution. Still, with all its defects, the work is vastly superior to the numerous plug-hatted platitudes of Broadway described above; and I am not sure but what it deserves, even in its present crude shape, to be listed for the attention of the discriminating theatergoer.

This Langner will bear watching. He is a fellow of ideas and genuine humour. One deplores the fact that he did not spend six months or a year longer on his present composition. It was well worth the extra labour. It might have been made a really first-rate play.

WHOOPERS AND TWITTERERS

By H. L. Mencken

I

Compared to prose, what is all poetry save a kind of nonsense?—*Karl Marx.*

OF the poetry chuted into my cellars since our last bout with the bards, that of James Oppenheim strikes me as the fairest and best, and that of Louis Untermeyer as the next best, and that of Edgar Lee Masters as the next best, and that of Ezra Pound as the next best, and that of Orrick Johns as the next best, and that of—

But let so much be considered the reading of the minutes. Oppenheim enters two books, "The Book of Self" (*Knopf*) and "War and Laughter" (*Century*), and both are full of a furious and insistent earnestness, a gaudy and prodigious gusto, the driving force of genuine passion. It is not the sort of poetry that, personally, I adore. My taste is for more delicate things—to be honest, for more artificial things. I like a frail but perfectly articulated stanza, a sonnet wrought like ivory, a song full of glowing nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions and participles, but without too much sense in it. Poetry, to me, has but two meanings. On the one hand it is a magical escape from the soddenness of metabolism and the class war, and on the other hand it is a subtle, very difficult, and hence very charming art, like writing fugues or mixing mayonnaise. I do not go to poets to be taught anything, or to be heated up, or to be made reflective or indignant, but to be soothed and caressed, to be lulled with sweet sounds, to be wooed into forgetfulness, to be tickled under the chin. My favorite poem is Lizette Woodworth Reese's "Tears," which, as a statement of fact, seems to me to be as idiotic as the Book of Revelation. The poetry I regard least is such stuff as that of Matthew Arnold, which argues and illuminates. I dislike poetry of intellectual content as much as I dislike women of intellectual content, and for the same reason.

But I am employed by this great family magazine, not as a voluptuary, but (once a year, at all events) as a reviewer of the poets, and this job requires me to put away mere pleasure-seeking for a wider experimentation. The result of that effort, as I say, is the conviction that Oppenheim, of the current boiling, is by far the most worthy of applause. He offends my pruderies by stripping off his draperies in his poems and searching himself horribly with flashlight, scalpel and X-ray, and still more by exposing, not only the corporeal man, but the fearsome and mysterious psyche within; but he does it all with so persuasive an eloquence, so fine a dignity, so delicate a feeling for the sough and burble of words, that he overcomes my objections before I can voice them, and his dithyrambs reach my midriff in spite of my guard. It is, in brief, the skill that was in old Walt Whitman—the skill to make something grand and stately out of embarrassing confidences, soapbox philosophizing, the bald recital of facts. I don't like old Walt, but somehow he always fetches me. I could bring in an indictment of Oppenheim, but somehow he leaves me with the impression that I have heard music, and seen a panorama full of color, and smelt the smell of life. . . . Superficially, he seems to fall

among the makers of *vers libre*, but that seeming is only seeming. The *vers librists* seek merely to experiment in hues and rhythms; Oppenheim has more sober and more interesting business. He is one of the few Americans of today whose originality is more than a tawdry endeavor to be different. . . . Nevertheless, the only one of his *opera* that I shall paste in my Bible is not a poem at all, but this little "Portrait of an Investigator of Vice":

His nails were perfect:
They were well-trimmed, shining and regular:
But under each was a spot of dark dirt.
In those nails I saw the man.

Untermeyer is a dervish of vastly different kidney. Oppenheim carries the thing off by the sheer weight of his sincerity; he is a sort of Brahms of prosody. Untermeyer is the Richard Strauss, the enormously adept and nimble craftsman, the virtuoso *par excellence*. Of all the poets of our national stud, he is the most dexterous, the cleverest, the most daring. There is no poetical job that he will not tackle, and there is none that he can't get through in a creditable manner. Does the foreman of the composing-room roar down the tube for two sticks of *vers libre?* Then Untermeyer has at him with some *vers libre* that Richard Aldington might own without shame. Is there a call for a ballade, a sonnet, a translation from the Bavarian, a bacchanal, a song for music, a couple of lengths of blank verse, some quatrains in strict form, a madrigal, a limerick? Then Untermeyer answers the summons with something that fills the order exactly. A gigantic ease in verse seems to be in him; he sets himself impossible tasks for the sheer joy of conquering them. In "These Times" (*Holt*), for example, he does a sonnet on a jewelry drummer; another on a dead horse. In ". . . And Other Poets," he essayed parodies so complex, metres so difficult, rhyme schemes so torturing, that the execution thereof took on the character of some fantastic feat of acrobatics.

But if you take this prodigious suppleness and ingenuity, this unmatchable mastery of the mere art of versifying, for no more than a hollow trick, then you are very much in error, for Untermeyer is not only the arch rhymster of the nation but also one of its most respectable poets, and in his latest book, as in "First Love" and in "Challenge," you will find abundant proof of it—proof here dished up in the form of a simple and beautiful song, and there in the form of a sonorous sonnet, and there again as a series of dithyrambs almost in the manner of Oppenheim. I give you "To the Child of a Revolutionist," the song in "Magic," "A Man" and "Moses on Sinai"; each suave and facile, each a clever thing, but each a good deal more. Facility alone, in truth, would not suffice for the concoction of such pieces; the more aptly they were done, the emptier they would seem. What Untermeyer gets into them, and into all of his serious verse, is a passionate exultation in the presence of beauty—a sort of æsthetic drunkenness, odious to the right-thinking, but not specifically forbidden by the police. This is the explanation of all his bawling against orthodoxy, which he himself often mistakes for moral indignation. He is really no reformer, even in poetry; he is merely one privy to the taste of Greek and Sinaian grapes, and hence gagged by the national buttermilk and coca-cola. . . . But despite the spiritual vine-leaves, he remains a bit cerebral and self-conscious: it is his broken leg. A true poet must be moony and unintelligent; the imagists disproved imagism when they began to prove it. I should like to see a book *on* poetry by this Untermeyer. But let him put away politeness when he writes it, and avoid cant; let him remember that an honest critic can never be a gentleman. Was Poe?

Masters, like Oppenheim, insists upon filling his compositions with ideas; he is, one may say, a programme poet. His poems are not so much exultations as exhortations, not so much rhapsodies

as pronunciamentos. He is full of advice, persuasion, remonstrance, indignation; he likes to revile things, particularly things that the average numbskull Methodist and democrat believes in. It is, perhaps, the easiest way to attract attention in the United States, provided one keeps within the bounds of the national superstition. That is to say, one must go so far but no further; one may dispute what it is a mere article of respectability to believe, but one must never dispute what it is an article of patriotism and virtue to believe. The Samuel Butler complex. The emancipated clergyman complex. Heterodoxy as a form of naughtiness. One finds it in such a piece as "Come, Republic." Here the republic is denounced for various errors and rascalities, but always on the ground that it is thus recreant to a lofty mission, to-wit, to serve as model to the more backward nations, to "be a ruler in the world." So far, so good. That sort of belaboring is plainly merely flattery, and none too delicate. To dispute any such mission, to flout this alleged function and duty—in brief, to admit that, after all, there may be finer civilizations than the Yiddo-Presbyterian—this would get the bard a walloping, and the New York *Times* would never be hymning him as "the only poet with true Americanism (*i. e.*, department-store Potash-and-Perlmutterism) in his bones."

But though Masters is thus a bogus prophet, and, to me, at least, a poet only by courtesy, he possesses one faculty that is worth a great deal more than the gift of prophecy, and even more than the talent for making songs, and that is the faculty of being interesting, the faculty of holding the eye. There are bad poems in "The Great Valley" (*Macmillan*) and there are poems that are not poems at all, but there is nothing stupid, nothing tedious, nothing without its moments. That fact, it seems to me, explains Masters' great vogue. He is a thoughtful and ingenious man, a capital companion, a fellow who intrigues the attention. In the midst of conventional poll-parrotting, he at least tries to do the thing in a new way—to deal with genuine people, to speak out his mind. Another poet who attempts that same thing is Conrad Aiken: his "The Jig of Forslin" (*Four Seas*) is something quite new: an effort to pump up poetry with the argon of the Freudian psychology. Unluckily, this effort interests me only academically; I can't get into the swing of it. Politics in poetry is bad enough; when it comes to the subconscious and the Oedipus complex I retire to the woods. Oppenheim dallies with that dynamite too, but he does not embrace it as affectionately as Aiken. The latter piles up complexes until there arises a sort of complex complex. This lifts the thing beyond my jurisdiction and comprehension. I have found "The Jig of Forslin" very muggy reading.

Pound and Eunice Tietjens, the former in "Lustra" (*Mathews*) and the latter in "Profiles from China" (*Seymour*), offer poetical evidence of that belated discovery of the Chinese spirit which has already had its influence in decoration. The Japs came first in Europe. They not only worked a revolution in actual painting; they also sent ripples through all the other arts, including poetry. That enchantment had its naif touches; the simian Nipponese were gravely accepted as the prophets of a new æsthetic. More sober inquiry has revealed the fact that they are really no more than facile imitators of the elder, lordier and far more honest art of China. The Japs, in fact, originate nothing; they are simply clever makers of deceptive shoddy. Their whole literature is Chinese; their art is Chinese in decay; their science is third-rate German; their politics is Italian; their philosophy is Oriental determinism tempered by English cant. If you would sense the nobler soul of the Chinaman read Herbert A. Giles' "History of Chinese Literature," one of the most charming books ever written by a college professor. Or go through the notes of the late Ernest Fenolossa, lately put together by Pound. Pound himself gets something of the true Chinese

simplicity, the Chinese skill at image-making, the Chinese dignity and delicacy, into his transcriptions. And Mrs. Tietjens, though she never drops the Caucasian robe, nor even that of the frank tourist, yet gives us a glimpse of the unfathomable romance and mystery of old China in her disorderly pieces. Both poets war upon the commonplace, the obvious, the stale. Both achieve something that was worth attempting.

As for Johns, his "Asphalt and Other Poems" (*Knopf*) contains some of the worst verse of the year, and some of the best. It would be difficult, within the limits of seemly invective, to do justice to the cheapness, the vacuity, the downright imbecility of his poems in dialect. They are, in fact, truly atrocious—Chimmie Fadden in terms of a sick Kipling. But turn over! Specifically, turn to "The Melody"—a charming melody indeed. Or to "The Last Poet." Or to "The Answer." "Be clear! Be clear!" said Ivan Turgeniev. "But not *too* clear!" There is in these poems a shimmering and mystical vagueness, a hint of something beyond. They are not propositions in this or that; they are simply beautiful things.

II

If I had my way, I would give every poet a punch in the kishgish.—*Ulysses S. Grant.*

COME various tomes by cried-up poets whose sweetest burblings leave me cold. For example, Irene Rutherford McLeod, author of "Swords for a Life" (*Huebsch*). I find, in a sort of appendix to the book, lavish encomiums by O. W. Firkins, William S. Braithwaite, the New York *Times*, the *Athenæum* and other such authorities, but all that I can find in the book itself is some hollow stuff in the finishing-school manner—in brief, the sort of stuff every literate flapper writes when she falls in love with her first moving-picture actor. Turn to a pretentious piece called "Beethoven." What could be more machine-made, more obvious? This Mlle. McLeod, I suspect, is one of the bogus geniuses that English publishers are forever foisting upon American blockheads. Another is Sarojini Naidu, a Hindu lady, author of "The Broken Wing" (*Lane*). Her hard, strained stanzas take one back to the days of *Godey's Lady's Book*. Yet another is William H. Davies, a hobo Baudelaire discovered by the practical joker, Bernard Shaw. He says that his best poems are in "Collected Poems" (*Knopf*). Davies, to be sure, is a far more skillful versifier than the Naidu or the McLeod, but to call him "divinely gifted" and to compare him to Herrick —all that is plain poppycock. We have at least twenty poets in the United States who are vastly better than any of these imported prodigies.

Nor am I lifted up more than a millimetre or two by the 1917 volume of "Some Imagist Poets" (*Houghton*). As usual, the best work in the book is by Richard Aldington, by long odds the most talented of the imagists. John Gould Fletcher says the inevitable things about Lincoln, and assembles all the rubber-stamps of mad poetry—*e.g.*, flying clouds, wind-blown branches, swirling leaves, brown stubble, strangling cry—in a dull piece called "Armies." Amy Lowell, a year or two behind the procession, dallies with the Japanese. F. S. Flint and D. H. Lawrence begin their lines with small letters —and let that dazzling heresy serve in place of inspiration. Lawrence, beside contributing to "Some Imagist Poets," prints a volume of his own, to wit, "Amores" (*Huebsch*). I select one lush and lovely line:

And the snore of the night in my ear.

Various other poets merely repeat themselves tiresomely. In "Harvest Moon" (*Houghton*) Josephine Preston Peabody offers one very excellent poem, "Seed-Time." For the rest, she does little more than offer evidences of the final collapse of a talent that was never very sturdy. "Livelihood," by Wilfrid Wilson Gibson" (*Macmillan*), is simply a rechewing of cuds. Gibson, like many other current poets, writes far too much. Having achieved success

with a new trick in poetry, he seems to be convinced that it can be done over and over again. The result is a very dull book. As for "Spectra," by Emanuel Morgan and Anne Knish (*Kennerly*), I find it nothing save a reboiling of the bones of Gertrude Stein, with music by the Greenwich Village *Stadtkapelle* of cigar-box ukaleles. With paper so expensive, it is astonishing that such drivel gets into print.

Far better stuff is offered by Scudder Middleton in "Streets and Faces" (*Little Book*); Morris Gilbert in "A Book of Verse" (*Privately printed*); Clement Wood in "Glad of Earth" (*Gomme*); Samuel Hoffenstein in "Life Sings a Song" (*Wilmarth*); Mary MacMillan in "The Little Golden Fountain" (*Stewart*); Pitts Sanborn in "Vie de Bordeaux" (*Brown*), and Ruth Comfort Mitchell in "The Night Court" (*Century*)—all of them, I believe, first books. Most of these poets have contributed to this favorite periodical. Miss MacMillan's "The Little Golden Fountain," a very lovely piece of free verse, first appeared herein. She opens her book with it, and adds another excellent poem, "Concerning Love," but she then spoils the feast by throwing in a lot of commonplace stuff, devoid of ideas and showing such banal rhymes as *jewels rare — colors fair*. Mrs. Mitchell also mixes the good and the bad. "The Night Court" is not a poem at all, and neither is "A Mountain Mummer." But pretty things go with them. Hoffenstein, I suspect, has a genuine poet in him, though he is yet somewhat awkward. In the case of Middleton there can be little doubt: he is already firmly on his legs. Wood, too, shows much promise, and so does Sanborn. Gilbert, a young fellow, prints some jejune stuff, but with it four or five poems of excellent quality. He has, moreover, a touch of humor: a rare quality in poets under sixty.

I see little else to interest you. William Rose Benét misses his mark in "The Great White Wall" (*Yale*). The thing needed sonority, and sonority is precisely what it hasn't got. Berton Braley in "Things as They Are" (*Doran*) and H. Stanley Haskins in "Cat's Cradle" (*Sherman*) stop at newspaper verse. Donald Evans in "Nine Poems from a Valetudinarium" (*Brown*) reins in his once-wild steed, and so drops out of the procession. In "Dust of Stars," by Danford Barney (*Lane*); "Californians," by Robinson Jeffers (*Macmillan*); "The Dance of Youth," by Julia Cooley (*Sherman*); "A Hidden Well," by Louis How (*Sherman*); "Rider of the Stars," by H. H. Knibbs (*Houghton*); "The Road of Everywhere," by Glenn Ward Dresbach (*Badger*), and "Out Where the West Begins," by Arthur Chapman (*Houghton*), I can find nothing save sound prosody. There is little that is positively bad in these books, but neither is there anything that is noticeably good. They fill the comfortable middle ground of current verse.

III

The true poet is of the devil's party.—*William Blake.*

It is sufficient to put Louis Untermeyer's "Poems of Heinrich Heine" (*Holt*) beside any other translation of the great Jewish lyrist, new or old, partial or complete, to see at once the extraordinary merit of the work. As I have said above, this Untermeyer is a clever rhymster—and never is his cleverness so plain as when he tackles the well-nigh impossible task of translating lyrics. Blank verse? It's easy enough: various Germans have done Shakespeare superbly. The epic? Recall only Chapman. But the lyric? Ah, there something rubs! The thing is so delicate, so fragile, so much a matter of overtones, that its transfer from one language to another is a business of truly staggering difficulty. Of all our lyric poets, only Poe has been done into French beautifully, and it took a Baudelaire to achieve the miracle. . . . But though his task was thus one for the collaboration of Hercules and the Graces, Untermeyer has, time after time, done a lyric of Heine into Eng-

lish with the utmost deftness and felicity. Now and then, true enough, he fails ingloriously. "The Two Grenadiers" is (and was inevitably) a mess. "The Lorelei" is a boiled violet. But these routs are curiously few. More often one is arrested by the address and ingenuity with which an obstacle is waved aside. Compare the worst of these translations with the work of Marguerite Münsterberg, a very competent translator, in "A Harvest of German Verse" (*Appleton*). Compare Untermeyer's version of "Die Nordsee" with that of Howard Mumford Jones in "Heine's Poem, The North Sea" (*Open Court*). . . . And, above all, don't forget the translator's capital introduction to his 325 translations. . . .

Two English versions of the lesser poetry of the late Emile Verhaeren are offered. Charles R. Murphy turns "Les Heures d'Après Midi" into suave verse in "Afternoon" (*Lane*); F. S. Flint does a prose translation of the whole cycle in "The Love Poems of Emile Verhaeren" (*Houghton*). These pieces exhibit the defunct poet in a somewhat unfamiliar mood: the dithyrambist of force and noise here sings the joys of love—more, of middle-age love. The version of Mr. Murphy is by far the more satisfying.

IV

Il doit y avoir toujours énigme en poèsie.
—*Jules Huret.*

ONE of the worst curses of war is the cheap and imbecile versifying that it produces. It seems impossible, in the midst of the turmoil, for the poets to keep their heads. Consider, for example, Kipling. Fifteen or twenty years ago he wrote very excellent soldier songs; perhaps the best in English. But today all he can manage is an endless series of hysterical hymns of hate—bosh so highfalutin and so discreditable to a grown man that his admirers can only pray God that the next Zeppelin fetches him. During the Spanish-American War I collected American war poetry, and at the end of hostilities had a bale of 896 specimens. In the whole lot there was but one decent poem—a brisk little ballad by Arthur Guiterman. This, it would seem, was an accident; Guiterman has written nothing of any merit since, and has lately taken to lecturing on poetry, the last resort of cashiered poets. The Civil War produced one good poem and no more. The Franco-Prussian War produced none at all, either in French or in German. The Boer War squeezed "The Dirge of Dead Sisters" out of Kipling, but that was after he had ceased making faces at the Boers. "Recessional," unless I err, came later. Moreover, it is anything but a first-rate poem.

Glance through the current offerings. In "Rhymes of a Red-Cross Man," by Robert W. Service (*Barse-Hopkins*), there is some very fair verse, but it is to actual poetry as "Poor Butterfly" is to a song by Brahms. Such stuff goes well when recited by flappers with pigtails down their backs, and no doubt it heats up the blood of the brave devils who now rush up to enlist in the commissary department, but I doubt that the boys in the trenches set much store by it. I have personally witnessed some of these boys at their recreations in camp and field. They were not reading poetry; they were playing *Schafskopf*, shooting dice, snoring beside their little stoves, or reading such periodicals as *Le Rire* and the *Police Gazette*. Their chief desire, after the longing for peace, was for a good burlesque show, with plenty of legs and a couple of rough gas-house comedians. I heard no demands for poetry. No doubt a small crowd would have turned out to see Sir Rabindranath Tagore, perhaps mistaking him for a sleight-of-hand performer. But a hundred times as many would have turned out to see Jess Willard, or Charlie Chaplin, or the Dolly Sisters.

Service's strophes, at worst, are at least self-respecting; they are written in a manly, though highly sentimental, frame of mind. The "All's Well" of John Oxenham (*Doran*) is simply